



TARGET ACQUIRED

A Tale of the Near Future

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No one believes in UFOs anymore. It's all Hollywood and fiction. However, there wasn't a government on the planet who didn't know they existed. It was a huge multi-government secret ... and you know how governments *love* secrets. But because the rest of us didn't know, we kept doing our day-to-day tasks: making money, improving the economy and paying those all-important taxes. For years rival governments used disarmament talks to quietly plan strategy and defense, especially after the Cold War. Which is why none of the talks ever amounted to anything significant.

Then some genius invented the UFO decoy strategy. The objective was to entice one of the ships to Earth ... and then shoot it down for its technology. Satellites were even launched giving out our exact location. Even the famous Star Wars system of the Americans wasn't intended for use against the Soviet Union ... it was intended to shoot down UFOs. It was one of those ideas like the unsinkable ship and the statement 'what can go wrong?'

The underground room as dim brightened only by the red alert lights. The air was filled with the smell of cleaning fluid and floor wax. In the center, a technician sat at a console staring at an illuminated screen. His face glowed green. "Comrade Captain, I have multiple targets on the screen."

"How many?"

"There must be thousands." The operator tried frantically to get data from a computer console. "There appears to be one over every major city on the planet."

"Contact Alpha Command." The captain's voice was stern but shaky. "Have all units go to Condition One."

Condition One, by secret treaty agreement, launched all the Earth's weapons of mass destruction at invading targets. No one could ever agree who should fire first ... as this would leave their country open to attack by one of the other powers. So, the only agreement anyone could reach was everyone firing everything they had at the same time. Once the first missile was launched, all the others launched automatically.

"But comrade captain, I have no satellite confirmation."

"Did you hear what I said?" His voice was now both strained and angry. "Alert Alpha Command and go to Condition One."

"Sir, may I respectfully remind the comrade captain the Black Brant Protocol requires a satellite confirmation."

The Black Brant Scare, or so it was known in Russian military circles, was an event from January 25, 1995 when a group of scientists launched a Black Brant four-stage test rocket from the northwestern coast of Norway. The rocket carried nothing but scientific equipment. Unfortunately, even though everyone on Earth had been notified of the launch, the rocket's trajectory resembled a U.S. Navy submarine-launched Trident missile ... at least according to Soviet Defense Command radar. Russian nuclear forces were put on high alert, fearing a high-altitude nuclear attack intended to blind Russian radar as a prelude to a massive United States strike. Russian missile forces were ordered to immediately retaliate with a colossal counter strike.

Fortunately, one lone Soviet officer refused to comply, arguing to high command a single missile was ridiculous and could not possibly be used to blind all Soviet radar. Plus, there was no reason for the US to strike first. They were just about to shoot him when they noticed the Norwegian rocket was headed out to sea. He was later given the Order of Lenin.

“This is not a single missile, you idiot!” the captain shouted. “We must defend the Motherland. I order you to fire.”

“With respect sir, I cannot comply without satellite confirmation. Perhaps we should get instructions from Russian Defense Command?”

The technician went back to the console and picked up a telephone handset. Then he could feel a cold barrel of a gun held against the back of his neck. “If we wait too long the ships will enter the atmosphere and radiation will rain on the planet for a thousand years. I order you to alert Alpha Command and bring the system to Condition One. If you do not, I will personally shoot you and issue the order myself.”

The technician carefully put down the telephone receiver. Under prodding from the pistol, he pried loose the red protective cover and opened the switch to arm the system. “Your key,” the officer demanded. “You will place it in the launch switch now.”

The technician took out his key from under his shirt and removed the chain from around his neck. He placed it in the control lock. Within seconds, the captain’s key was also in his lock. “On the count of three, we will both turn our keys.”

“And if I don’t, comrade captain?”

“Then I will shoot you and when you are dead, I will turn both keys myself. One.”

“Two.”

The next moment seemed to take forever to pass. Even though the lights flashed, and the arm of the radar screen continued to track across the screen. The menacing green dots appeared to grow as if the alien ships were blotting out the sun itself. “Three.”

They both turned their keys. The technician breathed a sigh of relief and put his head on the console. Nothing happened. It was all a test of some kind. Only then, after they relaxed, did they feel the room rumble. It was not a drill. The weapons were firing. Soon the sky would be filled with the smoke trails of newly launched missiles.

They both turned their heads to the tracking boards on the wall. Streaks of dotted lines filled the display, each heading for the closest target. The alien ships were quite low now, near the top of the atmosphere. It would not be long now. “Ten seconds to target, comrade.”

Quietly, the technician counted off the seconds until detonation of the weapons. Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one. The technician was expecting something to happen. Both of their eyes had opened to the size of saucers.

The blips of the alien invaders were gone. They had never been there in the first place. “Issue the abort order.”

The technician rapidly pressed a number of keys. Then when nothing happened, he pressed them again. "No response," he cried out. The officer slammed his pistol down on the console and began pressing the same keys ... with the exact same results.

"What's happening?"

"Our weapons are proceeding to their original targets, installations in the –"

"– the United States." the officer continued.

"What are the US missiles doing?"

"They are ..." The technician halted for a moment, staring blankly at the wall screen. "... they are heading directly for us ... for the Motherland."

"How long?"

"Three minutes to impact, comrade."

"Three minutes?"

"Yes, you moron, the great experiment of life on this planet is now over. You've managed to kill us all."