

“Grrrr!”

The first stage of the alien invasion was pretty lame.

I mean, we’ve all seen the movies where they arrive in gigantic ships that can each level a city with one blast of an energy particle beam or whatever, and then they open up and hundreds of smaller ships come pouring out and kill half the population in a matter of minutes. Now that’s how you stage an invasion! Am I right?

But all we got was one little ship...no, it wasn’t even a ship, more like an escape pod or something. And instead of a slimy, nine-foot-tall beast coming out and wreaking havoc, the pod just sat there. Pathetic, right? The pod was a dud. Or that’s what we thought at first.

A few guys had seen something splash into the lake, pretty close the dock where they were fishing, and one of them jumped in to see what it was. Yeah, not the smartest move on his part, but I guess he’d been drinking so he wasn’t really thinking clearly. He swam over to the spot and dove underwater to try to find it, but he didn’t come back up. His buddies say the water turned all yellowish and bubbly and they thought they heard some screaming and something like growling, but they were too drunk to be sure. They just ran off like little girls and left their buddy to fend for himself.

Within an hour, a bunch of other people at the lake died. They all had the same crazy, unheard-of symptoms. Supposedly, their skin turned yellow and scaly, their eyes turned pale green, and they grew claws and fangs. Then they started making deep-throated “grrrr” sounds and turned to attack anyone around them. Most of them fell down dead before they could hurt anybody, but the bystanders who did get bitten or scratched went through the same weird symptoms and died too.

That's why Mr. Blackwell was called in. He's my friend's dad and he was some sort of expert at NASA. The three of us were on a camping trip when he got the call, and he couldn't very well leave two teenagers alone in the mountains with no car, so we got to go along. He was so excited that we didn't even break camp; we just left our tents and gear where they were, jumped in the Jeep, and drove two hours to the town where it had all started. Mr. Blackwell just made us promise not to tell a soul where we were going or what we saw. And we didn't.

Sure, I texted a picture of one of the dead lizard-people to a couple of friends, but I didn't say what it was or where we had found it. I didn't know they would post the picture online. I mean, it was the ugliest thing I'd ever seen. Who would want to repost it? It's not my fault that people started calling it an alien invasion. Well, I guess I did mention NASA in my text, but Mr. Blackwell hadn't told us not to do that.

Of course, Mr. Blackwell was fired the next morning after the picture went viral, but I told him, "look, Mr. B., you're a smart guy...in a few days, NASA will come begging to get you back." They didn't. But that turned out for the best anyway, because he ended up causing trouble later. He really was a smart guy, though, and within an hour of examining one of the bodies that first night, he had figured out what was going on. He said the pod was releasing something that attacked the cells of whatever host it encountered. The attack was so intense that the host's body couldn't handle it, so their cells went crazy and started mutating and the victim just died. He was still trying to work out why everybody's mutations were the same, because he said they should be random, but he got fired before figuring that out.

I guess a lot of the stuff was released from the escape pod because it seeped into the town's water supply and even got into the river on the other side of the dam. Over the next few days, thousands of people got infected. Some of them mutated and died almost immediately, and some got sicker than a dog,

mutated over the next couple hours, and then died. It just depended on how much of the junk got into their body. But they all had the same yellow skin and fangs and stuff, and they all got aggressive and started growling at everybody.

Even animals were affected — dogs, cats, fish, everything that drank the water. I thought it'd be kind of cute to see a little hamster turn yellow and go "grrrr!" ...well, it'd be cute until it jumped right at your face with its new fangs sticking out.

Pretty soon, with all the great pictures and stories circulating online, the authorities couldn't keep a lid on it. Poisonous microbes from outer space were no big deal, but someone had actually made that escape pod and sent it here. There was no denying it...aliens were real! It was an exciting time to be alive!!

But then people started asking why aliens would send poison instead of just attacking the Earth themselves. What the experts decided was that the aliens had sent it ahead to make Stage Two of their invasion easier. Anybody on Earth who didn't die from the poison would be too weak to fight, so the aliens could show up a few months later and clean house with little-to-no resistance from the weakened human population. It was a good plan! I'd be proud to have thought of that myself.

The thing is, the aliens didn't know how smart we humans are. All we had to do was make a vaccine and mankind would be safe. It would work just like the flu shot: they'd take a tiny bit of the poison and inject it right into your blood, and then you'd build up antibodies against it. Genius, right? But they'd have to get a pure sample of the poison to make it effective.

Lucky for us, Navy divers found the pod in the lake and there was a sealed container inside with loads of poison that hadn't leaked out. That made no sense. If the aliens wanted it to seep out, why did they put some of it in a container too hard to break when the pod crash-landed? So much for aliens

being intelligent species, huh? Anyway, once the container was opened, doctors quickly started using it to inoculate everyone in a hundred-mile radius.

Still, if it got airborne, it could mean trouble all around the country and eventually the whole world, and there wasn't enough pure poison to help that many people. So some top scientists put their heads together and figured out that the poison was actually a weird kind of alien virus. They came up with a way to replicate the DNA strand inside that virus, and then they could mass-produce a vaccine.

Most people were thrilled to get the injection over the next few weeks, but there were some who said it was unnatural to put alien DNA into your body. They even staged protests, holding up signs and chanting things like "Save our Species!" But that was the whole idea! How could we save our species if we were all either dead or too weak to fight when the second stage of the invasion came? I mean, come on, people!

Some fools didn't even believe an invasion was coming, Mr. Blackwell for one. He thought he finally had an explanation for why the mutations weren't random, and he started spreading a kooky theory that made even more people refuse the vaccine. He said the aliens must have known their planet was dying but also that they couldn't survive long enough to travel to another solar system without some sort of faster-than-light spaceship. That part makes sense; I've heard it would take our current rockets 165,000 years to reach the nearest solar system. So, according to his idiotic theory, the aliens came up with a way to ensure the long-term survival of their species. They put their DNA strand into a virus and froze it in a bunch of escape pods. Then they shot them out into space in all directions, in the hopes that some of the pods would reach planets warm enough to support life. Entering the atmosphere would burn off a pod's outer shell so that when it crash-landed, the stuff could seep out and start infecting local life-forms. He said the alien DNA would gradually take over the host's cells

and re-write their existing DNA so that the host would mutate to become identical to the original aliens. That way, the alien species would survive even though the individuals who shot the pods into space had died millennia earlier.

But that's where his theory breaks down. I mean, if the mutations happened gradually, maybe it would make sense, but most of the victims mutated so fast that they just let out a few growls and then keeled over.

So, with crazy theories like Mr. Blackwell's floating around, you can understand why we had to form Species Protection Teams and round up anyone who refused the vaccine. Some of them resisted, unfortunately, but most of them gave up peacefully and we put them in a place where they'd be safe and wouldn't get in the way. They'll be released once they drink enough of the water we provide them. It's a lot slower process that way, but it'll still work eventually.

But, you know, the really great thing about our vaccine is that besides protecting you from that awful death-by-mutation, it actually makes you stronger in other ways. As soon as I took it the first time, I could tell a difference. I felt tougher, more vibrant, more alive! It was like steroids on steroids, but without all the messed-up side-effects. So the very stuff that the aliens sent to weaken us is actually making us stronger! Isn't that great? Most of the world's governments are distributing it free of charge now, because we can't afford to have any weak links when the alien invaders arrive. It's us or them, people, and we need our defenses to be as strong as possible!

And we're not just defending the Earth anymore. We're designing our own pods to shoot out into space, and they'll have plenty of the DNA vaccine inside so that any other planet our pods reach will be prepared for Stage Two also. Isn't it awesome? We're beating the dumb aliens at their own game!

We have astronomers constantly scanning the skies now, and they haven't picked up any signs of approaching spaceships, which means we probably have several years to prepare for the attack. Trust me, when the unsuspecting aliens get here, we'll be ready to protect our species.

It doesn't matter how big and bad the aliens are, because the Enhancer — that's what we call it now — is getting us ready. I've only had five doses so far, and my senses have already improved so much that I can hear the tiniest movements in the wind, and I swear I can almost see in the dark now. I can hold my breath under water for over 10 minutes, and I can go two or three days without eating. Isn't that wild? I don't even mind the yellow tint coming into my skin; I think it'll help me to absorb more sunlight or something because I have been feeling colder than normal lately.

But who cares? I'm planning to take the Enhancer as often as they'll let me, because with each new dose I take I can feel myself growing stronger...

and stronger.....

and strongrrrr!

THE END