

## **Short story: "First Strike."**

***The alien invasion of Earth has been defeated. The President of Russia is informed of something the invaders have left behind.***

The Secretary General of the United Nations announced the end of the war. Nominally he was the civilian head of the United Nations Global Defence Force that had fought the nine month war against the invader, although everyone on Earth knew that the US, Chinese and Russian military commands actually made the decisions. But all three realized the need for global cooperation, and so the three generals lined up dutifully behind the former Estonian president with his perfect English and bow tie. Across the world, crowds cheered as images from the three war zones, all in the rural heartlands of the three countries, showed Earth forces advancing past destroyed alien aircraft and land vehicles.

The war ended as abruptly as it had started. Three large ships had landed, and from them armoured vehicles and aircraft had immediately engaged the armed forces that had rushed to the landing sites when the ships had first been detected approaching Earth.

The people had watched in horror as their armed forces fought, the stories of a hundred TV series and novels and movies telling the tale of Man overwhelmed by superior technology, swatted away by impenetrable shields or lethal beam weapons that reduced Earth's armies to impotence.

Except: that wasn't what happened. The armoured vehicles and alien aircraft were fast and well-armed but not hugely more advanced than their opponents, and whilst they destroyed a higher proportion of their opponents, humanity's massive investment not just in the ability to kill other humans with greater and greater efficiency but in how to use them started to pay dividends.

As the people of Earth looked on, the three main powers, now aided by the smaller powers, and with Earth's industrial base feeding huge resupply of munitions halted the alien advance.

The initial horror as humans watched on their various devices as their forces were destroyed was eventually calmed by images of Earth forces fighting back. Most people could remember where they were when they saw the clip of Captain Yi Gang of the People's Liberation Army Air Force put a modified air to air missile into an invader aircraft he was pursuing and its disintegration into a fiery spectacle. Within days additional footage from US and Russian sources showed that it was, to a strange sense of relief, a war and not a massacre. Humanity was capable of fighting back.

It also became apparent very quickly that although the invader had superior weapons, they did not appear to have humanity's skill in fighting and

adaptation to its enemy. Human intelligence officers were quick to notice that the invader was very eager to recover any damaged vehicles, presumably to prevent human study of their technology. Ambushing recovery vehicles, or booby trapping downed vehicles became standard practice and a tactic that seemed to completely throw the enemy.

The UN Joint Intelligence Committee, pooling every piece of data that came into the possession of Earth forces was also quick to determine, by studying alien vehicles, that many were being repaired and returned to the battlefield, which meant that the invading force had a finite amount of equipment, unlike Earth which had a home field advantage and its industrial might.

Even with the limited amount of captured technology, Earth forces were able to study and anticipate the tactics of the invader in a way they simply did not seem to expect. Heavily armed drones were constantly being upgraded with new software based on military analysis of the invader battlefield method, to the extent that the latest generation of air combat drones were now fighting the alien aircraft on a one to one basis, rapidly depleting their air cover. Their ground forces struggled to adapt to new tactics without air support, and ground casualties increased sharply.

The alien invasion force collapsed on the same day, with generals not quite sure why, suddenly seeing via drone and satellite imagery what looked like a panicked collapse and withdrawal, their huge ships evacuating their three Earth bases within hours of each other.

Suddenly, the invaders were gone, their ships heading off into deep space. The allied forces advanced cautiously into the abandoned staging posts, still filled with strange bunkers with vehicles being repaired or resupplied with fuel or ammunition.

The President of the Russian Federation swept into the high ceilinged and ornate room where his generals and advisors stood waiting. He noted some people from the SVR, GRU and the ministry of science and technology.

He gestured them all to sit, and waved to his prime minister to begin the briefing.

“Good evening excellency: I’ve brought forward tomorrow morning’s briefing because our forces in the invader base have come across something of great interest.”

“A little green man?” the president drolly asked. Throughout the entire conflict no sight nor sound of the aliens had been detected. All their vehicles were effectively controlled by a form of Artificial Intelligence. Who they were, or why they had attacked was still in the realms of speculation.

“Alas no. As you know, we encountered no resistance on entering the base, and we did so cautiously, on the assumption that they may have adopted our

tactics of booby-trapping the huge amount of equipment they have left behind. I should stress that the many vehicles we have captured are almost identical to the vehicles captured by all earth forces in the early stages of the war, so we don't expect much technological benefit."

The Russian prime minister clicked a remote control, and a large image appeared on the screen taking up one whole wall of the room.

"We almost missed this. If it wasn't for an unusually tall soldier hitting his head on the wing..."

The president leaned forward.

"The wing of what? All I can see is an empty room....wait.."

He looked in shock at the assembled group. One or two of the older generals smiled.

"An aircraft completely impervious to visual or instrument detection. It is physically there, and seems to be, by process of, well, handling it, one of their ordinary fighters. But we never encountered a device like this. Our scientists are literally painting it now so it can be seen and studied."

"But this does not make sense. If they had a device like this, why not use it? Why weren't all their weapons invisible?"

"Our initial studies show that it requires a huge amount of energy to sustain the cloaking field. As you know, their vehicles are essentially electrically powered, but this vehicle has been fitted with some sort of generator. We are assuming that it is very resource intensive to create: a bit like us putting a nuclear reactor in a tank or fighter."

"Can we replicate it?"

"We certainly have worked out how to operate it, but we can't even determine its fuel source, so replicating it, in the short term, would seem to be a challenge. However..."

The prime minister pressed another button on the remote, and a new image came up of a Russian Tu- bomber sitting in a hanger. Klaxons could be heard loudly, before the aircraft flickered and vanished.

The president stood up.

"You can fit it to one of our aircraft?" he asked.

The prime minister nodded.

"And it renders them completely undetectable?"

"Completely. Visually. On radar. The field even dampens the sound generated by the aircraft rendering it totally silent. We could put this over Washington DC with a fully-loaded nuclear payload and no one would ever know. It is the ultimate first strike weapon, Mr President, and only we have it."

The President of the United States sitting in the Oval Office whistled softly as the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs explained the United States' latest acquisition.

The President of the People's Republic of China, an engineer by training,  
reached out and touched the invisible wing in its secret PLAAF underground  
hanger.

Behind Mars three vast alien spacecraft waited patiently.

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