

## Overseas

"Men, I don't have to tell you the severity of this situation." commander Gorhene said as he addressed the pilots. "The Zargon fleet is approaching Capital Planet, Center for the Federation of Peace Loving races. You twenty pilots are all that stand between the enemy and the freedom of all races of the Federation." The mood in the room was tense. The war was going badly and now it had all come down to this.

"I realize the odds against us are immense, but you are the best of the best." the commander continued. "You each have the gift that makes you a great fighter pilot. You have fought many battles and we have lost many a good friend and comrade. But they didn't die in vain. They died so that their families, indeed, their races can go on living free. Their names, their deeds... your names, and your deeds... will not be forgotten; not as long as there are people who live free. It is now in your hands. It is your turn, to stand once again on the line that keeps the chaos from getting into the peace. Your actions today will not be in vain. Your actions today will go down in history as the greatest victory for freedom ever. And we will win, because we fight for all that is good and right in this universe. You do not fight for your survival today, but you fight for the survival of the universe!"

A great cheer arose in the room. Even though there were only a couple dozen people in the room, the cheer was much louder. Each of their spirits was lifted. This was more than a cheer, it was a rallying cry. These people were all pumped and ready to fight. This would be a glorious battle and even though they were greatly outnumbered, they were going to put up one heck of a fight. Jim was reminded of a line from a poem he had once heard from an old Rodney Dangerfield movie: "I will not go gentle into that good night." He found this very encouraging and wanted to share it with the others. But then he remembered he was the only human, and none of the other races had ever been to Earth. Most of them had never even heard of Earth, and it was for sure that no one Earth new of the existence of other life in space.

Jim's life had really changed in the last year. A year ago, he was just a computer programmer working for an international bank. Then, one night, while walking through the park, he was abducted by aliens and was taken into space with them. Shortly after that he managed to overpower his captors and escaped. He was later rescued by the Federation, found to have "the gift" for a fighter pilot and joined in the fight. If it all hadn't happened to him, he wouldn't have believed it possible. And now he was smack in the middle of the fight for good and evil.

".. and we must not faultier as destiny is calling our names. This will be our finest hour!" The commander continued as the pilots cheered. He knew he had sufficiently worked up the pilots and it was time to release them. They were ready as they were going to get. "So let's go out there and fight for freedom!"

"For Freedom! For Freedom!" the pilots chanted as they left the briefing room heading for their ships. Jim fell in the line, cheering at the top of his voice. Then, something hit Jim in the side of the head...

"Earth to Jim! Earth to Jim! HELLO!!!" Bob exclaimed. Bob had crumpled up a sticky note and had thrown it at him. Jim turned to see Bob looking at him over his cubical wall. Jim wasn't walking to the hanger bay to get into his Star Fighter, he wasn't even in space. No, he was at his desk, working for an international bank. "What, have you learned to sleep with your eyes open? I've been yelling your name for the past couple of minutes from across the room. Be careful, the company is always looking to save money and wouldn't hesitate canning you and replacing you with an outsourcing company. Those people oversea can do just a good a job as you and a lot cheaper. I swear, sometimes I think a monkey with a stick could do as good a job as you. We need to see you in the conference room now!"

Bob Nivins was Jim's supervisor. Bob had control over what Jim worked on, but no power, other than recommendation of performance. But that never stopped him from acting like he did. The problem was that, with the company always trying to cut costs and having a push towards

out-sourcing everything possible, that recommendation could hold a lot of weight. It was something Jim couldn't take the chance on.

"It's a meeting with Wayne, James and Cheryl." Bob continues as Jim fell in behind him walking towards the conference room. "It's a meeting about the upgrade to the on-line banking project." Bob always called managers by their first name when they were not around. He thought it made him sound more important if others thought he was on a first name bases with them. But in their presence, it was always, Mr. this and Mrs. that.

Jim was kicking himself as he followed him. He couldn't believe he got caught day dreaming again. He needed to be careful about that... "What?" Jim suddenly realized what Bob had said. "The upgrade to the on-line banking project? But I'm not on the upgrade project. You have all that work being done by Synatech." Synatech was the outsourcing company, located in India, that World International Bank had hired to do all its help desk and development work. The only reason Jim had gotten hired was that the CEO felt the firewall application was too complex and too important to be done outside the bank.

Bob suddenly stopped and turned to face Jim. "Now Jim, remember Wayne; you know: the Chief Information Officer, doesn't like "I" players. He only wants "Team" players, and there is no "I" in his or my "Team". This is a chance for you impress the CIO; don't blow it."

Jim just stared at him. Using every ounce of control he had not to say something back. Bob always said something like this. And it was usually just before he hung Jim out to dry. This did not give Jim a good feeling about this meeting. After an awkward moment, Bob turned back around and headed towards the conference room.

They were in the nice conference room. The bank had two. One for meeting with clients and other big-wigs, and a smaller one that everyone else in the company was supposed to use. The staff was only supposed to use the nice conference room if the other conference room was being used and the meeting couldn't wait for the small conference room to become free. Even then, if some big-wig manager wanted the conference room, they would just kick whoever out. Of course, since Mr. Wayne Jenkins, the CIO was involved in the meeting they would be in the nice conference room. Jim doubted if he had ever seen the small conference room, or even knew of its existence.

Since the CIO and the Chief Financial Officer were both in this meeting, Jim knew this project was in trouble. His only concern was how this was going to affect him. Bob pointed to a chair at the end of the conference table while he took his seat across from Cheryl Newell, the CFO. This didn't help Jim's comfort level as he was now the only person sitting at that end of the table and there was an empty chair on each side of him. It had the effect of making him feel like he was being put on the spot. The only thing missing was the hanging lamp overhead and he would be ready to get the 3rd degree.

"To bring you up to speed, we are trying to figure out what is going on with the upgrade project." It was Mr. Jenkins himself speaking. "Are you aware of the current status of this project?"

Jim's mind was racing trying to figure out what could be wrong with this project that would involve him. The only thing he had done on the project was write up a review of the security model the project team had developed, but he had turned that in four months ago. "No, no sir." he finally stuttered.

"Well," Ms. Newell continued for Mr. Jenkins. "the project has burned up all of it's funding, is two weeks past it's delivery date, and has nothing to show for it." Jim was shocked. That project was supposed to a slam-dunk. The requirements were already done. They even had screen mock-ups and an updated data model. He couldn't see how this project could be that far off. "And Bob has been telling us that a major reason is that your security review was poorly done. Bob said that the team had tried to work with you get a better analysis done, but you were uncooperative. They finally had to do the analysis themselves, which is what has taken so much time and eaten their budget."

What the hell! Jim thought. This is the first he had ever heard of a problem with his analysis. He felt his face going flush. "There was a problem with my work?"

"Wouldn't you say there was a problem in that you had to keep doing the work over and over again?" It was James Morgan, the office manager speaking. Mr. Morgan was both Bob and his boss. "I realize that it is not easy dealing with a company that caused all your friends to be laid off, but that is no excuse to act unprofessionally. If you expect to keep your job, or any job for that matter, you need to learn to act in a professional manor. Synatech, like you, work for the World International Bank. They are your peers and you need to treat them like that."

Jim felt his face getting even redder. But this wasn't from terror. It was from anger. Bob had really screwed him over. Not only had he blamed the failure of his project on him, but had made Jim look like an unprofessional employee at the same time. Jim just glared at Bob. He was just about to unload and speak what was really on his mind when he caught Mr. Jenkins looking at him, waiting to see his response. "There is no 'I' in Team" came to his mind. He bit his tongue, let out the breath that he didn't realize he had been holding, and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't realize that my performance had been so detrimental to the project." This was all true. He was sorry... that he was in this situation and he had no idea his performance would be used as an escape goat for the project's failure. "I will make sure this never happens again."

"Well, I'm going to have to take steps to make sure this doesn't happen again too." Mr. Morgan replied. "I'm going to have to do a Work Improvement on you. You are a very talented young man. We have no doubt of that. The firewall project you worked on for the bank was featured in IT Monthly last month. Bob has said you did a good job on that project and show great potential. But we can't afford any more issues like this."

It took every bit of control Jim had not to jump across the table and strangle Bob. 'Did a good job!' He had written the whole thing himself, and Bob had taken all the credit. "Yes sir. I understand." Jim finally said with his head down. Mr. Morgan thought he had his head down because he was ashamed of his actions, but in reality, he had his head down to hide the look of total contempt for Bob on his face.

"Very well, I will meet with you first thing tomorrow morning to go over your Work Improvement. You're dismissed."

"Yes sir." Jim got up and headed out the door. Work Improvement; that was just management speak for micro managing you, assigning you more work, giving them a reason to fire you, or at the very least guaranteeing that you won't get a raise at your annual compensation review. After he had left the conference room, he just grabbed his coat and backpack and headed for the exit. It was after 5 and he had no desire to talk to anyone at work, especially Bob!

Jim arrived at the bus stop in plenty of time. The bus he needed to catch only came on the hour and the bus stop was only a 5 minute walk from the office. Jim was still pretty steamed when he arrived, so he didn't take notice of the people already at the bus stop. He just stood there, staring at the traffic and thinking of way to get back at Bob. He had lots of ideas, but he knew, deep down, that he would never follow through with any of them. No, he would be the good employee and just take it. We would love nothing more than to quit that job, but after his graduation, he had spent a year flipping burgers at a Burger King because he couldn't get a job. He had sent out many applications, but there were lots of applicants that had degrees and years of experience, and they were willing to work for the low wages. The dot com bust and then outsourcing overseas had played havoc with the job market. When he had started college, there was a shortage of computer people and plenty of high paying jobs. But by the time he graduated, there were too many programmers and not enough jobs.

Suddenly, Jim was knocked down to the ground. When he turned to see what had hit him, he saw the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. "Oh, I am so sorry. Please let me help you up." she said in a thick Russian accent as she reached out and grabbed Jim's hand. "Dat was my fault. I was not vatching where I was going. Please forgive me."

"That's okay." Jim replied in almost a stunned stutter. Jim couldn't take his eyes off her as she was stunning in a knee length red dress that fit her body just perfectly. She had a figure that would be perfectly at home on the runway of some big fashion show. But it wasn't the dress or even her figure that held Jim's attention, it was her eyes. They were brown, and deep; the kind of

eyes that Jim could get lost in. There was something deep in those eyes, deep in her soul, that Jim couldn't take his eyes away from. He was so lost in her eyes that he hadn't even noticed that he wasn't speaking; that neither of them were speaking. It wasn't until her eyes changed that the spell was broken. A concern or even a fear had filled her eyes. She quickly looked back the direction in which she had come.

"I must be going." She said and began to quickly walk away.

Jim was amazed how quickly and gracefully she could move, even in her matching red heels. She had gotten about half way down the block when he realized he had blown it. He didn't introduce himself. He didn't get her name. In fact, he hadn't said anything at all. Mentally, he kicked himself in the butt. What a dummy. He had bumped into a beautiful woman, had obviously made a connection with her, and didn't even talk to her. This was clearly the problem with his love life, or lack there of.

As he was chastising himself, he looked down to see if anything had fallen out of this backpack. That's when he noticed a small wooden box. It was about the size of his mom's recipe card box. "She must have dropped this." he said to himself. Here was his second chance. Here was a chance to talk to her and maybe get her number. Even if the box wasn't hers, it was a second chance. Quickly he picked-up the box and headed down the block after her.

He couldn't see her, but he knew that she had gone this way and couldn't be too far ahead. He had run about two blocks, when he came to stop. He had checked at each intersection, looking to see if she had turned, but he didn't see her. He was starting to realize that he had lost her. He looked up and down the street, but she was no where to be found. Sighing, he looked at the box. "I wonder what is in the box?" he mused to himself. "Maybe there is some kind of contact information in it." The box looked like a wood box that would hold 3x5 cards. It was made of two pieces of wood, with the lid attached to the base by hinges on the back. He was sure that his mom had one just like this she keep her favorite recipes in. The thought of his mom made him smile.

Jim had just begun opening the box when he heard a scream from the alley behind him. It sounded like a woman's scream. He turned and looked down the alley. About half way down, he could see two men, facing the wall of a building. What was in front of them was blocked from view by a dumpster. By their mannerisms and gestures, Jim could tell the men were upset about something. Jim decided to get a closer look as he was too far away to hear what they were saying. He moved along the building the two men were facing, crouching low and moving as quietly as possible. As he approached, he could clearly make out the two men. They looked like they had been cut from the same mold. Both were very muscular and were wearing dark suits and fedoras. They looked like the kind of people you didn't want to meet in a dark alley. The taller of the two, which was the closest to Jim, was pointing a gun at the wall. Jim managed to reach the dumpster without being seen.

"Come on Natasha, just give us the box and we won't mess you up any more." Jim heard one of them say.

The other guy let out a sigh and said: "Natasha, what were you thinking? You can't escape from Vladimir. No one can. Not even here in American. Just give us the box. That's all he wants."

As Jim listened, he could here the sound of a woman sobbing. "That must be Natasha" he thought. He decided to try to see who Natasha was, so he positioned himself so he could view behind the dumpster, between it and the wall of the old apartment building. There, on the other side of the dumpster, was a woman, sitting on the ground, in a red dress and red heels. "It's HER!" he mentally exclaimed.

"I don't have the box. I must have dropped it somewhere." Natasha said. "And if I did give you the box, would you just let me go?"

"You're not that naive, Natasha. You know his rule." the second thug replied with a wry smile. "The only way out of the family business is in a pine box."

"Oh my god!" Jim thought. "They're going to kill her."

"Vell I don't have the box. I must have lost it." She replied with a bit of defiance in her voice.

"Have it your way then." The first thug said. "We'll just search you after you're dead."

Something just happened in Jim. Without thinking, he sprung up and came around the dumpster at a full charge. Using a move he learned as a lineman in his high school football team, he dropped his shoulder and plowed into the man with the gun. The gunman was totally caught by surprise and the block knocked him down to the ground. Unfortunately for him his head smacked into a rock, knocking him unconscious. His cohort, was also completely surprised by this move, but quickly came to and began to reach behind him, under his jacket, for his gun. But Jim was just a little faster and caught the man with a full upper cut to his jaw. Jim had put everything into that punch, and it had hit its mark. The man went down, and didn't get back up.

Jim stood there for a second; his mind catching up to what he had just done. He thought: "Who knew the guy would have had a glass jaw?" Then Jim remembered Natasha. He turned to see her, crumpled on the ground, mouth open wide, in disbelief of what she had just seen. Jim reached his hand out and said, "Can you move? We should get going before they come to."

"It's you!" she said, suddenly realizing who her rescuer was. "Ahh, yes. Yes I can." She took his hand and got up. Jim then reached over and grabbed the gun that had fallen from the hand of the first thug.

"Oh, shit!" Natasha exclaimed.

Jim jumped, looking around. "What? What's wrong?"

"Oh, I broke my heel. And these were new shoes. Oh well. Better a shoe than my life." She reached down and took both shoes off. "It's easier to run in no shoes than with a broken heel."

Jim just smiled. She was truly beautiful; even in suffering the tragedy of a broken heel. He stuffed the gun in his belt at the small of his back, took her hand, and headed off down the alley.

Jim was taking alleys and back ways, leading her far from where those two goons were. He had been leading her for about 20 minutes before she broke the silence between them.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Some place where we can lay low and figure out our next move." It was then that Jim spotted an old empty warehouse. He led her to a door, and with a little force, he got the door open. He pulled her inside and closed the door again. It was a big, empty building. But there was a small office in one corner of the building. Jim led Natasha to that room.

The room was sparsely furnished with a table, a chair and an old filing cabinet that had seen better days. Jim let Natasha sit in the chair as she was rather winded from their escape through the city. Jim then took off his backpack. "Thank you for saving me." She said. "You are a very brave American." The look in her eyes was true gratitude, but there was something more there. Was it a touch of admiration, or even love?

Jim just smiled and said "You're very welcome. My name is Jim." He reached in his backpack and pulled out the wooden box. He had put the box in his backpack when he was behind the dumpster. "So what's so important about this box that they wanted to kill you for it?"

Natasha's mouth dropped open, surprised to see Jim holding the box. "I must have dropped it when I ran into you."

"You did. And I picked it up and came after you to return it to you. That is how I ended up in that alley, trying to find you. Now why did they want to kill you for it? What's in it? And who is Vladimir?"

"Let me start from the beginning to explain. One year ago, I was a book keeper for an export company in my home of St. Petersburg, Russia. When my company offered me the job of book keeper for their office in America, I jumped at the chance. To come to America, it had been my dream since I was a little girl. Well, about a month ago, I found some irregularities in the books. When I brought this to my boss, he told me not to worry about it that it was normal accounting here in America. That didn't sit well with me, so I did a little investigating. That is when I found that the company I worked for was really a front for the Russian Mafia. And what they were exporting out of Russia included women for prostitution. I was totally shocked. Unfortunately, I was not a very good detective as I got caught by my boss. They took me to see the head of the Russian Mafia here in America, Vladimir Sharonko; an awful man. He told me that I had two choices; I could continue working for him and keep my mouth shut, or I could die. He fancied himself a cowboy and likes to say 'the only way someone leaves the family is in a pine box.' Well, I choose to continue working for

them, scared to death, looking for a chance to escape. I thought I had found a way when I was able to grab Vladimir's micro-cds, with all the data on every illegal thing the Russian mob has done here in America. I figured I would escape, then use it to trade for my life. Oh, why me? How did I get into this mess?" She began to sob.

Jim walked over to her, and placed his hand on her shoulder. "There, there. It's going to be okay."

"How?" she pleaded, as she looked up at him, tears in her eyes.

"Well, you're not alone now. You have me on your side. And I'm going to make sure you get through this." Jim looked down into her eyes, lost again. His heart was filled with a desire to keep this woman safe, to protect her; to just make her smile again. He knelt down and took her in his arms.

"Excuse me, sir." Jim heard, with a gentle tap on the shoulder. Jim turned to see an older Asian gentleman he often saw at the bus stop tapping on his shoulder. "Isn't that your bus?" Although the two men had never really talked to each other, it was easy to figure out what bus people normally ride when you see them everyday at the same bus stop.

Jim turned to see a bus pulling away. Written on the back of the bus was number 128. "Yes. Yes it is" Jim said with a sigh. "Well," Jim thought "the next bus isn't for an hour, might as well go check my email."

As Jim walked down to the corner to cross the street, he wondered if he was more bummed he missed his bus, or because he was interrupted in a really good day dream. He was going to have to remember that one and come back to it.

Jim often used an internet cafe across the street from the bus stop. Email was the only way he could afford to keep in touch with his mom, but he couldn't afford to have a computer at home. The irony was not lost on him either: that a person whose job it was to program and work on computers didn't even have one at home. But Jim wanted a better life. He wanted to be able to move up in the world. And knew that that would take money, so every penny he could, he put into his savings account. The only thing was that with his wage, minus rent and food, there wasn't much left to put into savings. In two and 1/2 years with the bank, he had managed to save almost \$500. The one thing he would spend money on was time on computers at internet cafes. This allowed him to stay in touch with his mom and to check computer job web sites.

Jim entered the cafe. It was crowded, as a lot of people seem to check their emails right after work. Jim was able to find a free computer and sat down. He entered his cafe account number, and then logged into Yahoo to check his email. As the contents of his inbox were displayed, a smile came to his face. There was a new email from his mom. That always cheered him up.

Jim didn't get home until almost 8pm. He had stayed at the internet cafe for almost 2 hours. He tossed his backpack on the sofa bed and walked to the kitchen area. It wasn't much of a kitchen. It was really just a sink, hot plate and a 1/2 sized fridge. This small furnished studio apartment was all he could afford, and Jim hated it. When he entered the apartment and turned on the light, he kept his eyes closed for about 15 seconds. That way he wouldn't have to see the cockroaches scurry out of sight. It didn't help much, as he still knew they were there, but it helped some.

Jim wasn't sure what he was in the mood for dinner, but his choices were somewhat limited. There was the can of tomato soup. There was also the box of Mac and Cheese and two hot dogs in the fridge. He could make Mac and Cheese and dogs, but he decided that it was all too much work and settled for a cold Coke from the fridge and the 1/2 bag of Doritos on the counter. Having "made" dinner for himself, Jim walked over, turned on the small little TV, and sat down on the sofa to eat his dinner.

The TV was the only furnishing he had added to the apartment. It was an old 13" TV he had bought at a pawn shop. It was so old, that it had a manual knob style tuner control. But that didn't matter anyway as Jim did have cable and with the small antenna; he could only pick up 2

channels. Jim mainly left it on one channel and either watched what was on, or turned it off. Fortunately, there was a new episode of Law and Order on, so Jim decided to leave it on.

About half way through the show, Jim was startled by the sound of glass breaking against the wall behind him. Then he heard a woman scream: "If you think you can do it better, why don't you fucking do it yourself!"

"Oh, god, not tonight." Jim pleaded to himself. It was the couple in the apartment next to his: The Lopez's. About twice a week, they would break into an item smashing, yelling at the top of your lungs argument. Some tenet in the building would eventually call the cops. Jim had even called them once, right after he had moved in. The cops would come, the couple would settle down, neither would press charges and the cops would leave. It always happened that way. The only thing was, Jim didn't know which was worse, the arguing, or the sound of them making up, which was almost as loud but didn't involve breaking anything.

Jim got up and turned off the TV. He rolled up the bag of uneaten chips and placed the rubber band around it and put it back in the kitchen. "From the sounds of it," Jim thought. "Tonight is going to be a dozy of an argument." He walked over and grabbed a black, rectangular case he kept by the couch. He placed it on the couch and opened it up. He then took out his saxophone and began putting it together. "Since they're making so much noise, I might as well get some practice in." he thought.

Jim had started playing the saxophone in high school because he thought it would make him look cool and would attract girls. It always seemed to work in the movies. However it didn't attract girls, but he had found he enjoyed playing and it helped him relax. As he started playing, he realized he was actually glad that they were fighting; otherwise he wouldn't have had the chance to play tonight.

"What's that?" Jim said, pointing to the display screen. "Bring that up."

"It's an asteroid." Glank Gorrin said as the screen focused on the asteroid. "Composition: 80% iron, 10% carbon, ..."

"Ok." Jim said cutting him off and a little annoyed. Glank was Jim's navigator and even though he was a Shlimmin from the planet Belshine 4, he was Jim's friend. "Project its path in relation to the Zargon fleet." The screen zoomed back out. As they watched, the small blip of an asteroid got closer and closer to the path of the fleet. "There! See, it gets within two clicks of the fighter formation in front of the fleet."

"Yes it does." Glank replied rather matter-of-factly. "So?"

"Well, what if we were to park our Fighter on that asteroid and shut down all power? The enemy probably would not detect us. Then, once we are at this point; the point where the asteroid gets the closest to them, we can power up and attack. We will have the element of surprise."

"Yes." Glank said with sudden understanding. "But that won't help much since as soon as we start firing, the nearby ships will just tell the other ships and the element of surprise won't mean much. There are over 100 ships we have to take on."

"I've been thinking about that too. Have you ever tried to have a conversation with someone in a room with a screaming baby?"

"Yes." Glank said not seeing where Jim was going with this.

"Well, it's nearly impossible. All you can hear is the screaming kid."

"Yes." Still not seeing the connection.

"Well I say we do something similar."

With a look of confusion on Glank's face he said "You want to take a baby into battle?"

"No!" Jim said exasperated. Glank was a great navigator, but was sometimes a little slow on the uptake. "I say we broadcast on all voice and data frequencies. We broadcast nice and loud. This will basically jam their communications."

"Ah. That might just work. We may live through this battle yet."

Jim smiled and patted his friend on the back.

BEEP, BEEP, BEEP.

Jim rolled over and looked at the clock. "Has it been nine minutes already?" Jim said to himself. "Feels like I just hit the snooze button." He reached over and turned off the alarm and set on the edge of the sofa bed. Since electricity was included in his rent, he had taken to sleeping with the light on. It helped keep the roaches away when he woke up.

This was not the life that Jim had thought he would have. When he graduated from high school, computer jobs were in high demand. The dot com boom was in full swing and there was such a shortage of computer programmers that they were bringing them in from other countries. Programmers out of college were making almost 6 figures and experienced programmers were pretty much righting their own ticket. But the world changed a lot by the time Jim graduated from college. The dot com boom turned into bust. Add to that a turn in industry to out-source computer work to overseas companies that could do the work for one-fourth the cost. This left a huge glut of programmers and very few jobs. The only job Jim could get after college was flipping burgers. When the bank offered him the job, he jumped at it, even though the wage was low. What made matters even worse, the bank seemed to know this and took advantage of the fact that Jim needed the job. They made him work extra hours and treated him as expendable. And since he was salaried, he didn't get paid for the extra hours. He hated it, but felt powerless to do anything about it. He would move back home, but the job market there was even worse. There was no demand for a computer programmer in a small rural town.

Jim looked around the room and let out a heavy sigh. He normally didn't like going to work, but today would be even worse. Today he would have a Work Improvement. He thought about calling in sick, but since he didn't get sick leave, he would have to use one of his vacation days, and he was saving those to go visit his mom at Thanksgiving. Nope, he would go into work today. This would not be a good day. At least it was Friday.

Jim got to the office almost a half hour early, but even so, there was a note from Mr. Morgan on his chair. It said "See me in my office A.S.A.P." He had hoped to at least check his email before facing Mr. Morgan, but apparently not. Jim shored himself up mentally and headed for Mr. Morgan's office. If he was going to get in trouble, he might as well get it over with. He had had enough of Bob's incompetence and was going to tell Mr. Morgan all about it. Jim had reached his limit. As he arrived at Mr. Morgan's office, he found the door closed. Just as he was about to knock, the door suddenly opened. But it wasn't Mr. Morgan at the door, it was Bob. That alone made the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. But when Bob recognized Jim, a Cheshire cat grin came over his face. This was not even going to be a good day. Bob then turned his head back into the office and said "he's here". Jim then heard Mr. Morgan reply, "Good, send him in." Bob held the door for Jim then without a word, he left the office, closing the door behind him.

"Sit down." Mr. Morgan said, without even looking up from the papers on his desk. Jim sat down in the only seat that was right in front of Mr. Morgan's desk. After a long, awkward pause, Mr. Morgan looked up and said, "First, I want to set some ground rules for this meeting. We are not here for you to justify your actions to me. I don't want to hear about why you did what you did. I don't care. The fact is that your actions have not been in the best interest of the bank."

"But sir..." Jim started, but was cut off by the look that Mr. Morgan gave him.

"I don't want to hear any excuses. In fact, it is probably best if you don't say anything at all."

That took the wind out of Jim's sails. Apparently hadn't reached his limit and could take more.

"Now Jim," Morgan continued. "You are a very talented person. We value your skills here at this bank. If we didn't we wouldn't be having this conversation right now. We would have just fired you. But you have to work on your 'team' effort skills. You are too much of a cowboy. We can't afford that here. Now I have been talking with Bob. And even though he has seen your maverick ways first hand, he also says that you are very talented. In fact, when I first learned of how you had screwed up the upgrade project, I wanted to fire you, but Bob convinced me that you were worth keeping. You are lucky to have Bob in your corner."

Jim's heart just sank. This was going to be bad, he could just feel it.

"In fact, Bob has agreed to over see your Work Improvement. Bob is going to monitor your work, assign you tasks that he feels will help your team player skills, and basically mentor you. You will be working very closely with him and he is going to report to me each week on your progress."

And there it was, the big blow Jim was dreading. This would now make him Bob's personal slave. He would now have to do whatever Bob said. His life was about to become a living nightmare.

"Now you need to take this seriously son." Mr. Morgan continued, confusing the look of dread on Jim's face as a look of defiance. "I expect to hear glowing reports from Bob. If not, then I'll be forced to let you go and have Synatech fill your position. Even though that would save the bank a lot of money, I don't want to have to do that. You're a good kid and I think you could have a bright future here at the bank."

"How long will Bob be my 'mentor'?" Jim managed to say without sounding too sarcastic.

"One year"

Jim's lower jaw almost hit the floor.

Mr. Morgan grabbed a piece of paper from off his desk and handed it to Jim. "Now this is the written version of your Work Improvement. It states why you are getting the Work Improvement and outlines what the Work Improvement entails and what we expect. You might notice that those sections don't say that much. That is because we are leaving that to Bob. Read over this and sign it. I will then place a copy of this in your personnel file."

Jim just glanced over the document and then signed it. He was too numb at this point. To Jim it felt like he was signing himself into slavery. His Work Improvement was to do whatever Bob said and his measurement of success was making Bob happy.

Mr. Morgan took the document and said, "Now go report to Bob. Your Work Improvement begins immediately."

Jim stood up and left the room. He mind was dumb found. He couldn't believe what had just happened. This was worse than any punishment he could think of. The man that had blamed him for something he did not do, who got him in trouble, was now in charge of his fate here at the bank.

Jim was not disappointed either with the Work Improvement. Bob had him doing all the lousy jobs he could think of. He made Jim write up his project status reports, call clients and Synatech; basically, be his secretary. On top of all the new work, Jim was still expected to get his regular work load done too. Every time Jim would say something about his work load, Bob would just say "Team Player". Jim knew what that meant and would just shut up and do it. As soon as the clock hit 5pm, Jim was out of there. He made sure to make himself scarce as the hour approached so Bob couldn't demand he stay late or work the weekend. This was going to be a very long year.

Jim knew he wouldn't catch his bus, since it arrived right at 5 and it took him 5 minutes to walk to the bus stop. But that was OK, he just headed straight for the Internet Café. Maybe today would be the day he would find a better job. The café was about half full so Jim had no problem finding a seat. He had no new emails, so he starting checking the job web sites.

"Excuse me, sir. Are you Jim Donovan?" Jim turned to see two tall men in nice business suits standing behind him.

"Yes, who wants to know?" Jim replied

"The same Jim Donovan that developed the firewall/security system for the World International Bank?"

"Oh," Jim signed, and began turning back to his computer screen. "You want Bob Nivins."

"I do not believe we want Bob Nivins. We have interviewed him and found it highly improbable that he was able to develop such a system. His mental capabilities for developing such a system are inadequate."

That got Jim's attention. He turned back to the two men. "You already talked to him?"

"Yes." Said the stranger. Even though there were two of them, only one was doing the talking. There was something different about his speech, an accent or something. It was pretty obvious that English was not his first language. He seemed to speak almost perfect English. "And although he has a very high opinion of himself, we found him to lack any technical knowledge. It took much talking, but he finally told us your name, but I do not think he meant to."

That just topped the perfect lousy day. Bob had told him that he always mentioned Jim's name, but the interviewers always cut him out of the story. The man had to be Satan incarnate. Jim sighed. "Well, what do you want with me then? You've already talked with Bob."

"We want to offer you a job."

You could have knocked Jim over with a feather. Jim couldn't believe it. "You want to hire me?"

"If you are the one that developed this security firewall." He held up a copy of the IT Monthly article about the new firewall at the bank.

"Well, ahh, yes I am the one that wrote the firewall system." Jim said in a daze. He couldn't believe this was happening to him. Who were these people? Who did they work for? What kind of job was it? Jim's mind was racing. "With whom? What kind of job?"

"Please" the man said gesturing towards the door. "We have a car outside. We will take you there and answer all your questions."

Jim's mind started to race. What did these guys really want? Was this some kidnapping thing? Maybe it was a test by the Bank. Could these guys be here as some test by Bob and Mr. Morgan, to test his loyalty? That must be it.

As if reading Jim's concerns, the man added, "We have a very nice dinner prepared."

OK, these guys couldn't be from the bank, the bank was too cheap to buy him dinner. He decided to play along. He might even get a free dinner out of it. "OK, why not. Let me just close my email and we'll go." Jim turned back to the computer and logged out. Then he got up and followed the men out the door. He noticed that both the gentlemen were both tall, over 6 feet tall. It made him feel like a kid walking next to them. There was something else that bothered Jim. He couldn't quite put his finger on it though. It had to do with their faces. They were off somehow. Maybe their eyes were a little too big, their mouths a little too small; there was something, but he wasn't sure what.

When Jim got outside, he couldn't believe the car: a full stretched Hummer limo. The rental on one of these had to be enormous. They definitely were not from the bank. They opened the door and let Jim in first. Jim could not believe the luxury. Everything was covered in either leather, shag carpet, or wood. Jim sat in a seat facing the front of the car, while his hosts sat across from him. As soon as the door was closed, the car began to pull away.

"Soooo," Jim said nervously, wondering what he had got himself into. "where are we going?"

"To the airport. There we will transfer to our jet." said the first gentleman again. "From there, we will go to our headquarters."

"What!" Jim exclaimed. "We're flying there? Where is your headquarters? We're not flying out of the country are we?" Jim was nearly in a panic. Surely he was being kidnapped and taken out of the country. How stupid was he to just get right into the limo. He started thinking of a way to escape. "I ... I don't have my passport, or anything. I left them at my apartment. We need to stop there first." That would at least get him out of the limo and a chance to escape.

His hosts could easily read the fear and panic in Jim's eyes. The second host spoke. "Relax Mr. Donovan. You are not being kidnapped, and no harm will come to you. We have no ulterior motives and I promise you, you will be returned to your home safe and sound. We truly do have a job offer for you and it is your choice to accept or decline the job. You will not be forced to do anything you do not want to do." The panic in Jim's eyes began to subside. "Let us start by introducing ourselves: My name is Lo-click-tor, but you may call my Lucy. This is my associate Cal-tick-tor, but you may call him Calvin."

Jim hadn't even realized that he didn't even know their names. Dangle a new job and a limo in front of him and he would follow around like a puppy. He was kicking himself for being so

stupid when the names hit him. Lo-click-what? "Ah, those are vary unique names, where are you from? Is that where we are going?" Then he realized the second was called Lucy. Was she a girl? How did he miss that?

Lucy smiled. Her smile was warm and friendly. It helped put Jim at ease a little bit. She continued: "We are from another.... country. And yes that is where we are going." Her voice was soft and friendly, maybe a little deep for the average woman, but not any deeper than other women Jim had met.

"How long is it going to take to get there? How long will we be gone? I don't have a change of clothes or anything with me for an overnight trip." It was already 6pm and unless the other country was Canada, which Jim doubted, there was no way they would get back tonight.

"Do not worry." Lucy said in that calming voice. "You will return on Sunday, and we will provide you will everything you need, including a change of clothes. We have this very well thought out. Just sit back and enjoy the trip. In the mean time, let us tell you about the job."

Jim sat back in his seat. He was still a little leery, but for some reason, his gut said this was on the up and up. Why he chose to listen to his gut, he wasn't sure as his gut only had a 50/50 batting average. But after the day he had had, he could use a diversion. Besides, if this is on the up and up, then this could be a great job opportunity. Calvin handed him a can of Coke, which Jim popped open and took a sip. "OK, I'm listening."

As she continued speaking, Jim realized what was odd about his two hosts. Their hair were both brown and of short length. They both had a tan complexion, possibly of Middle Eastern descent. They were both wearing the same outfit. But what was odd was their shirts. Not the shirt itself, as they where both simple white dress shirts, but rather how the shirt fit them. Both of them looked of normal weight, but whenever the shirt rested on their body, it hinted at a lump or bulge.

"We represent a government with a very large computer network." Lucy continued. "We have recently come to realize that our security systems are..." She paused to find the right word. "lacking."

Calvin snickered and muttered "that's an understatement." He was greeted with a glare from Lucy.

"We are looking for someone to help secure our networks." she continued, turning back to Jim. "We have looked within our own people, but we do not have the knowledge to undertake such a task. The job we are offering is to be in charge of securing all our networks. You will have a staff as big as you need it to be. We are also looking for you to tutor our people; to help train our people on security techniques."

"You mean, NO one in your country knows more than me?" Jim said in disbelief. He was fully focused on the conversation now.

"We have had several attempts that failed miserably." Calvin said with a look of sadness.

"But why me? There have to be lots of other people better qualified than me?" As soon as the words left his mouth, Jim was kicking himself. "I just screwed myself out of this job. When will I learn to think before I speak?" He thought to himself.

"Jim," Lucy replied. "We did not pick you at random. We have been searching for almost a year now. You are the candidate we want. You got high scores in college, plus the work you have done one the Security firewall for the bank is exactly what we are looking for. We have great confidence in your skills and will support you fully. You will have full carte blanche."

Jim was stunned by this. He had been put down for so long that this kind of open praise for his work felt weird.

"Ah, I see we are here." she said looking out the window.

Jim looked out the window, expecting to see the main airport, but instead they were at some small private airport. Jim was a little disappointed. He was expecting a big jet. Instead, it would be some small prop plane. Where were they taking him anyway? The limo pulled up to a gate, which opened and they pulled out onto the tarmac. The limo then pulled up by a hanger and stopped. All the disappointment he felt when he saw the airport was gone when he stepped out of the limo and saw the plane. There in the hanger was the sleekest plane he had ever seen. The body wasn't round like most planes, but was more of an oval. The wings were short; almost

too short. And the engines; well, he couldn't see any engines. If it flew at all, then this thing looked like it flew very fast. Lucy walked over to the plane and as if sensing her presence, the door opened up. She motioned him aboard. As Jim walked up to the plane, he noticed that the fuselage was directly on the ground. He just stepped into the plane. Lucy and Calvin followed him in. Jim was just as impressed with the inside of the plane. It was decked out in leather and wood. It felt much like the limo he had just left. He walked over and sat in one of the plush swivel chairs. Lucy sat in the other swivel chair and Calvin sat on the little couch. The door then closed and the plane began to move. Jim felt himself feeling like a little kid again going on an exciting trip.

"Can I get you anything? A Coke maybe?" Calvin asked noticing that Jim had left his can in the limo. He got up and headed for the little kitchenette.

"Sure, Thanks." Jim said. Then he turned to Lucy. "How long will the flight take?"

"Not very long. This plane is very fast." She said with a mischievous smile. But then her expression turned very serious. "Tell me honestly, what are you thinking about the job offer?"

"Well," Jim replied. "it sounds great; almost too good to be true. I almost expect there to be some down side." Then Jim realized they hadn't talked about a wage yet. "I mean, we haven't talked about a salary yet." he said tentatively. Calvin handed him the soda and sat back on the couch.

"We've done our research and know how much you are making at the bank. We are will to offer 4 times that amount."

Jim's jaw hit the floor. This was beyond his wildest dreams.

"But we have not been completely honest with you." She continued. "And now that we are in the air it is time to place all our cards on the table, as they say."

Jim looked out the window and was astounded. Not only were they in the air, but they were already above the clouds. This plane was fast and smooth. He didn't even remember the bumps of takeoff. Turning back to Lucy, a ball began to grow in the pit of his stomach.

"Now, I want you to understand that you will, in no way, be harmed or detained. We will return you to your home safe and sound. Nor will we try to extract information from you. You are completely safe."

If she was trying to ease his mind, it was having the opposite affect.

"When I said that we were from a foreign government, it was the truth, but not the whole truth. The government we represent is no government you have ever heard of. In fact it is not a government on Earth." She waited while that statement settled in.

Jim waited for the punch line. This had to be a joke or something. Not of Earth, what kind of gullible fool did she take him for. But as the silence went on, he realized she was serious. He turned to look at Calvin and he nodded in agreement. "Oh, come on. You're kidding, right? What? Am I on Punked, or Scare Tactics or something?" he said to Lucy.

Lucy turned a puzzled look to Calvin. Calvin replied. "Punked and Scare Tactics are entertainment shows where humans put other humans in strange or scary situation to record their reactions."

"Ah." she replied and turned back to Jim. "I assure you this not one of those entertainment shows. We are not recording your reactions."

"But, this has to be a prank." Jim said in mental desperation. "This kind of thing just doesn't happen except on TV."

"Why do you think this is a prank?" Lucy asked.

"Well for one thing, you're human."

"Although we do have many common characteristic, I assure we are different." She turned to Calvin. "Let us show him."

On that note, they both stood up, which made Jim a little jumpy. He was starting to feel a little freaked out. What they did next though, made him blush. The both began unbuttoning their shirts. Jim squirmed in his seat until the last button was undone and the shirts were opened up. Then his jaw hit the ground, again. What came out of the shirts was another pair of arms. They each had 4 arms. As the shirts came off, the both stretched out the new arms. Calvin said "That feels good. I was starting to cramp up." As they did so, Jim could clearly see there bodies. They

were each wearing a form fitting shirts. Lucy had a red one and Calvin's was purple. It was the first color Jim has seen on these two. But what was more shocking than the color, was their torsos. They were both ungainly thin; too thin to be human. Then Jim noticed another difference between the two. Jim could now tell that Lucy was a female, at least by human standards. She had breasts, but not just two; she had three!

"As you humans say, looks can be deceiving." Lucy said as she sat back down.

Jim quickly looked away, his face turning red as he realized he had been staring at her chest.

"I am sorry for the deception, but we cannot very well walk around Earth like this." She said, holding out all four arms.

Jim's mind was slowly coming back to him. "But why visit Earth at all? Your technology is more advanced than ours; there is nothing we have to offer. Unless you plan to take over the Earth?" Panic began to rise in him. "That's it, isn't it? You are going to conquer the Earth and enslave us. Or kill us!"

"No. I assure you that is not our plan at all." Lucy replied. "And actually, the Earth does have something to offer us. That is why you are here."

Jim was confused now and it showed on his face.

"We are Sheethians. Our home world is called How-no. Our people did not have the internal strife and conflict that your people are experiencing. We have always been at peace. As we have reached out to explore other worlds, we have met one other race and they too are peaceful. Now we do not have the misguided belief that the universe is full of peaceful races. We do have a military and weapons. But it wasn't until we came to Earth that we discovered how vulnerable we were. You humans are very creative in your means of warfare. It had never occurred to us that our own computer systems could be used against us. The concept of hacking was very startling to us. It was determined that we needed to secure our computer system. We have tried several attempts. As a test, we have placed an isolated system on your internet. In a matter of hours, hackers have always broken into the system. That is why we have decided to try to hire a human to help us. And that brings us to where we are today."

Jim's head was swimming in all the information. This was too surreal. This couldn't be real. This just didn't happen. Was this a day dream? He tried to wake himself, but it didn't stop. He was still on the plane.

Calvin was looking out the window and said, "Oh, good, we are here."

Jim turned to look out the window. What he saw would have seemed very strange any other time, but given all that had happened, it fit right in. He saw a field of stars. No horizon, no ground, just stars in all directions. And there, towards the front of the plane was, well of course it had to be, a planet. Jim had seen pictures of the Earth from space and it didn't look like this. Earth was always a cloudy blue ball. This was mostly green ball.

"That is our home world, How-no." Calvin said with pride in his voice.

"It is a very lovely planet and I am sure you will like it." Lucy said, looking at Jim.

"Ahh, I'm sure it's a real nice place, But this is just too much to take all in. I mean, I have gone from the worse day of my life to about to be the first human to step foot on an alien world. You have to admit, it is a bit much to take in all at once." Jim replied.

"When you put it that way, it does seem like a lot." she answered back. "But that does not make it any less real."

She had them there. They spent the rest of the flight in silence, with Jim looking out the window. The planet grew in size at an alarming rate. Within minutes they were down on the ground and the door was opening. They had landed on top of a building. Jim walked over to the edge and was awed by what he saw. He saw lines of cars criss-crossing around building after building. The only thing was, they were not driving on the ground. They were in the air. And they were layers of them. And the buildings were so tall, that they were above the clouds. He was so high up that he could barely make out the ground below.

"I imagine it's very impressive site for you." Jim had not even heard Lucy step up behind him.

"Yeah. It's something out of a Sci Fi movie or something."

"We are on top of the Institute for Computers. This is primarily where we do all our computer development." She began leading Jim to a door. "I have to say, we thought our computer programming was quite advanced, but once we came across your world and saw how your computer systems were protected and hacked, it scared us. The thought that we could meet a race that could try to use our computers against us was just something we had never thought of." They reached the door where Calvin was waiting. "Here, step into the lift. We'll take you to your office and introduce you to the people that will be your staff."

Office? A Staff? It was bad enough that he was on another world talking with aliens, but his own office and a staff? That was just too much to believe.

The lift barely felt like it moved and only a second had passed when the door open again and Lucy walked on out. Jim just numbly followed her. The floor was huge. There were desks and offices everywhere. At first it looked like they were setup in some random order, but the more he looked, the more he began to see a pattern. It was a pattern that made sense. It seemed to flow, making it easy to navigate, while encouraging cooperative work. Lucy began introducing him to the staff and everyone he meet was very friendly and seemed happy to meet him. Many commented on how excited they were to work with him and learn about computer security. If it wasn't for the fact that they were all aliens with four arms, Jim would have been completely at ease.

Lucy finally said, "And this will be our office."

The office was huge. The desk was white with a clear top. There was even a small table with clear chairs around it. The office was bigger than Mr. Morgan's office. It was the biggest office he had ever seen. "This would be my office?"

A smile was across Lucy's face as she said "Yes."

Jim walked in and sat at the desk. As he placed his hand on the desk, the surface changed to a computer screen and under his hands, he could see and feel a keyboard rising from the surface of the desk. "Wow!" Jim exclaimed.

A small chuckle came from Lucy. "Are you hungry?" she said.

"Ahh, yeah, sure." Jim replied. He looked at his watch and realized that it was already 7:00pm and he had skipped lunch.

"Well, we have a nice dinner setup. This way."

Jim got up and followed her to the lift again. "Can I eat your food? Will it kill me or make me sick?"

"You will be fine. We have studied this and found our eating requirement are almost the same. In fact, I have rather enjoyed your pizza."

"Oh, OK." Jim said. The ride down, he assumed it was down, to the floor only took another second. From the lift they walked to where several cars were parked. Or at least they would have been cars, if they had wheels. The ride to the restaurant was short but scenic. Lucy and Calvin talked about their society and about the job. Jim was too busy looking out the window to really hear what they said.

Dinner was good and there were a couple of new people joining them, but Jim didn't remember much from it. The entire evening went by like a blur. They set him up in a nice room and gave him some reading material detailing the history of the Sheethian people. Jim did asked how come it was in English, and they told him that they had translated it for him. He didn't get much sleep that night. He spent most of the night reading and then thinking about everything. When he finally woke up, and got moving, the sun was up and aliens were going about their business. But for that matter, he didn't know if the sun had set. Did this planet have only one sun or two? Maybe it was always daylight out.

Lucy had given Jim instructions on how to use the transit system and how to get back to the Institute. He was a little nervous using the transit system at first, but found it was pretty easy to follow as it was all color coded so he didn't need to read anything. Although he had gotten a few awkward stares, most people he meet were friendly and even tried to engage him in conversation. This proved unfruitful as he didn't speak the native language, and they didn't speak English. The day was spent meeting more people, seeing a presentation on the vastness of their

computer network, and sight seeing. By the end of the day, Jim was really enjoying himself. He found that most of the people he would be working with had already learned English and their computer system had been programmed to translate to and from English.

The sun was beginning to set when Jim found himself boarding the little plane with Lucy and Calvin again for the trip home. They were all silent until after the plane had lifted off from the pad on top of the Institute building. Finally Lucy said, "So, what do you think about the job?"

"It sounds like a great job. I still have a couple of questions. I noticed that during my time here, nobody paid for anything? How do you propose to pay me?"

"Well, our society has no need for monetary gains. If you need something, you just go get it. Everything is provided. As such, we will provide you with room, food, clothes, everything you could need." That reminded Jim that he hadn't changed his clothes in two days. There was a change of clothes in his room, but they had got the wrong size and they didn't fit. They must be getting pretty ripe. "Although we do not have money, we have found that your world values certain minerals. We have been able to convert one of these into your money. I believe you call the mineral Gold. We would be paying you in cash from the conversion of this mineral."

"Ah, wow. That would work. But you are not going to want to pay for everything with cash. That will get you flagged as a possible drug dealer. That will cause the authorities to begin watching you much closer."

Lucy turned to Calvin with a look of shock. She then looked back to Jim. "We had no idea. We do not wish to call attention to ourselves. What would you suggest?"

"Well, you could just set yourself up with a bank account. You could manage it on line and use the debit card to purchase stuff. You could even manage it from here. I saw that you have some Earth computers setup with access to our internet." Jim had even used one to check his email and read a reply from his mom.

"Thank you. Yes we do have access to your internet. We have found it an incredible resource about Earth and Earth people. You are a most interesting species."

Jim asked a couple more questions before Calvin finally said "We're here."

"Oh." Jim said with a little disappointment in his voice. "Hey, how did we get there so fast? I mean I assume your planet is around another sun. Do you have warp speed or do you create a worm hole? Space folding?" he had seen enough Sci-Fi's to know the terminology.

It was Calvin who replied. "None of those are correct. Space travel is based on an understanding of space that your people have not discovered yet."

"Oh." Jim replied again with a little more disappointment. Those had always sounded like really cool ways to travel and something he could tell others about.

Lucy handed him a piece of paper. "Think about the offer. If you decide you want the job, all this number."

"Is this the number to a space phone?" Jim said with a twinge of excitement.

"No," she replied. "It is to a prepaid cell phone." She pointed to Calvin who was holding a cell phone.

"Yeah, and if you take the job, maybe you can show me how to download ring tones. I cannot figure out how that works." Calvin said looking at the phone.

Jim let out a chuckle. He got back into the limo and it dropped him off at his apartment. As it turned out, Jim had spent over 24 hours at the other planet as it was Sunday morning now. After he took a shower and changed his clothes, he went for a long walk in the park. He had a lot of thinking to do. On one hand it was an incredible job, but it was with aliens on another world. He would have a great apartment, without the cockroaches. They would provide good food, clothes, even health care. The people were nice and friendly. In fact many had seemed excited about his line of work and knowledge. The job was a dream job. He would be in charge of a staff and would be creating a security system for an entire network. His current job only promised misery for at least the next year.

But what about his friends? Wait, he didn't have any friends. But his mom. He would miss his mom. Or would he? He stayed in contact with her via email now, which he could do from

How-no. He only saw her on holidays, which he would still be able to do as they promised him he could take vacation as often as he needed and return to Earth.

But they are not human. It's on another planet. What if they are tricking me? What if? What if? It wasn't until that evening he had made up his mind. He walked over to a pay phone and called the number.

When Jim got back to his apartment, it took him no time at all to pack. It all fit into one suitcase. It was an old hard sided one that had belonged to his father. The only thing he didn't pack was the old TV and he wouldn't need it were he was going. He sought out the manager of the apartments and told him he was giving him his notice. He had just paid the rent, so it covered the 'notice period', but Jim told him he would be out as of tomorrow.

Jim woke early the next morning and headed out. He wanted to get to the office early. When he got there, only a couple of accountants were there as the bank was undergoing its yearly audit. He got a couple of strange looks as he walked in with his suitcase and saxophone case, but no one said anything to him. He sat down at this desk and began to compose his letter of resignation. He really wanted it to be a work of art. He wanted to let the bank have it for making him work under such terrible conditions; and keeping Bob around. He made several starts to the letter, but they always ended up sounding unprofessional. Then it hit him. The way to make the bank suffer the most was to let them keep Bob. He simply wrote:

To whom it may concern:

I quit. I have two weeks of vacation time and I will be using that during my two week notice period.

Sincerely  
Jim Donavan

He signed and dated the letter and headed for Mr. Morgan's office. Mr. Morgan was in and Jim just walked right in and handed him the letter. The reaction he got was not what he expected. He had expected them to try to talk him out of it, but instead Mr. Morgan said, "I had hoped you would be more professional than this. This is exactly the immature behavior that Bob has told us about. You didn't like the Work Improvement, so you fly off the handle and quit without thinking through the consequences. What will do you? How will you pay your bills now? Go back to flipping burgers?"

The arrogant SOB. He felt the bank held Jim over a barrel. Jim was steaming, but just said "I guess that will be between me and my new employer." He then turned around and walked back to his desk. He spent the next few minutes cleaning any personal files from off his computer. Once that was done, he logged off, for the last time, grabbed his suitcase and saxophone and started for the exit. The only thing left was to turn in his security badge to security. As he approached the security desk though, he ran into Bob, who looked more than a little upset.

"What are you doing Jim? Mr. Morgan just told me that you quit. You can't do that." Bob went on and on for several minutes, ranging from insulting him, implying Jim could not get anywhere without him; to begging Jim to stay. Jim had thought at one point Bob might even cry. Jim had so much he really wanted to say to Bob, but in the end, he didn't say a word. He just walked around Bob and handed in his security badge to security station. He then walked out the door and didn't even look back.

Jim then walked to the internet café. He had told Calvin to pick him up there at noon. There was only one thing left to do: tell his mother. At this time of the day, the café was almost empty, despite the line of people getting coffee. He sat down and began composing:

Dear momma,

I have some great news. I just got a new job. It is a great job; my dream job in fact. It's with a company

Here he paused. He needed to tell her something about the job and where he would be living, but what. She would never believe the truth. But what could he say?

Jim was shaken out of his train of thought by a hand on his shoulder. "Excuse me, sir." a woman's voice said from behind him.

Jim turned to see a blonde girl that worked here at the café. "Ah, yes?" was all he could get out. The café was more crowded than Jim remembered.

"Is this your suitcase?"

Jim looked down where she was pointing. "Yes it is."

"Well, it's blocking traffic, would you like me to put it behind the counter for you?" She said with a warm smile.

"Sure thanks. It's a little heavy, so let me carry it." Jim replied.

"Are you taking a trip somewhere?" She asked as she led him to the counter.

"Actually, I just got a new job and I am moving."

"Oh, and what do you do?"

"I am a computer programmer."

"I hear that job market is pretty bad, with all the companies outsourcing at all."

That's when it hit Jim what to say in his email to his mom. He replied "Yes it is." and walked back to his computer. He continued:

It is with a company that is overseas. I am going to have to move there, but don't worry, I will still be able to check my email and will be home for Thanksgiving and Christmas. ...

Written by: Mike Chrisman, 2005