

June 12

Breaking news. Aliens invade Earth, or so the radio blares. Invaded, yeah. The TV shows something that looks like a cross between a tour bus and a *Star Wars* X-Wing landing in a park in the middle of Tokyo. Then one lands in New York City and then in Sao Paulo. All within five minutes of each other.

The military goes crazy, launching planes to intercept the invaders— all the militaries all over the world. But nothing happens. The aliens don't do anything except land. They're lucky they didn't get shot down.

Then they just sit there. People gather. The news goes bonkers. Within minutes, all regular programming is canceled. Every station shows pictures of the big event. Reporters and politicians vie for the spotlight, each giving their own explanations and predictions. Then soldiers arrive, pointing guns at the ships. More uniforms come, more guns. Loudspeakers order the invaders to come out with their hands up. Between the action, the commentary gurus get their chance to spout a lot of nothing, over and over.

After about thirty minutes, each ship extends a ramp to the ground. Then a door slides open. All at the same time.

Everyone tenses. The crowds stop milling. Even the news reporters shut up. The stations flip back and forth between the three ships.

Out walk two aliens from each ship. They look a lot like us, people, humans. They have two legs, two arms, a head on top of a body, eyes, nose, mouth, almost like us, except they have fur; red, brown, black, yellow, just like cats. But they don't look anything like cats. Their eyes are blue, green, and yellow, at least the ones on the news.

Their fur isn't long or messy like Chewbacca's, just soft and short. At least, it looks soft. Most have straight fur, but one has curly fur. Their ears are round, close to their heads, and higher than ours. And their nose is rather flat, pink, and furless. And they're short and skinny. Every channel has a different view of the aliens.

They stand at the top of the ramp and look around. No guns, no space suits, just empty hands, and simple clothes—shirts, slacks, jumper dresses.

So here I am, a reporter slash artist, stuck in Los Angeles when all the action is in New York. Well, I will be a reporter when someone hires me. Since I can't be there, I haul out this diary. I intended to keep a journal of my university experiences but never wrote anything. Now that really interesting things are happening, I pretend I'm a journalist and write everything down as if it might someday get published. I'll transfer it to my computer later.

I watch the news and draw flowers. That's what I do when I can't do what I want. My art teachers say I should draw something more relevant, but flowers are fun, and they're easy.

At least the voices have stopped.

I better explain that. If anyone ever reads this, they should hear my side of the story.

Something happened during my last semester at UCLA, I only had two classes left. I majored in both art and journalism. Art is my first love, but I don't think I can make a living at it, so I also majored in journalism. That may not have been the best choice. Reporter jobs are just as hard to come by. All went well. My grades were good and everything until the voices started, voices in my head all the time — gibberish intruding on my every thought.

I'm not exactly sure when it started. At first, the voices were faint, only intruding on my consciousness when my mind drifted, mostly during really boring lectures. Then it got worse. It sounded like a garbled version of Japanese, different pitches, but long and slurred. I thought I was going bonkers. Sane people don't hear voices. So, I did everything I could to ignore them.

For a while, music or any loud noise blocked them out. When that didn't work, I went to see a shrink. The doctor told me it was all in my mind, imagine that, and gave me some pills. The pills made me sleepy but didn't stop the chattering inside my head. I refused to believe I had some kind of mental illness but couldn't deny the voices.

Eventually, they got so loud I couldn't hear anything else. I ended up in a psychiatric ward at a hospital. I didn't want to go, but I guess I kept yelling at people to shut up - people who weren't even there.

They pumped me full of drugs and forced me into daily counseling sessions, but nothing worked. When alone and not too drugged, I paced around my room, holding my head. Even tried hitting my head, but nothing changed. This went on for about two weeks.

Then, right in the middle of a counseling session, the voices stopped. Just like turning off a radio. I sat and stared at the counselor while he went on about my relationship with my mother.

"They're gone," I said. "The voices have stopped. I'd like to go home now."

He insisted on finishing up the session. But the silence in my head was wonderful. I ignored him.

Back in my room, the nurse came in with more pills, which I refused. Now that my head was quiet, I wanted my thoughts to be clear. She got pissed, but I stood my ground.

After she left, one voice started again. Focusing all my thoughts on that voice, I yelled at it to shut up. It did.

Sometimes, way back in my mind, I still heard faint voices. Maybe they were memories of my bout with insanity, or maybe they were real. Eventually, even they faded away, or maybe I got good at ignoring them. Anyway, I declared myself cured and tried to go home.

It took me another week to get out of that place.

No matter how many times I told the doctors that the voices were gone, they didn't believe me. They wanted me to tell them what the voices said so they could find some underlying cause. I told them I couldn't understand the words.

No matter how many times I refused to take the meds, they continued to try to force me. For the most part, I won. The pills went on the floor, and only once did they get an injection inside me.

If you admit yourself to the hospital, you are free to leave whenever you want. But if someone commits you, you have to prove you are sane before they lose you on the world. Since I had been committed, they refused to let me declare myself healed and go home voluntarily.

One day, I snuck out, expecting someone to come and bring me back. But no one did. So, I went back to my old life. My parents were happy that I was well, and most of my friends accepted my recovery without question. The teachers let me make up the work.

I'm glad I wrote that. Now, maybe I can stop thinking about it.

My best friend, Romana, arrives with pizza, and we watch the news together. She's also an unemployed journalism major.

For a few minutes, the two aliens in New York, one with curly red fur, the other with brown fur, just stand at the top of the ramp, scanning the crowd. Everyone on the ground keeps their distance. The aliens look at each other for a moment. I swear one shrugs. They take a few steps down the ramp. Everyone on the ground goes in different directions. A reporter is spouting words so fast they don't make sense.

Several soldiers run forward to arrest the aliens, but people in hazmat suits push them aside. Before the hazmat suits can get to the ramp, a reporter leaps the barricade, sprints across the grass, pushing people aside, and sticks his microphone in the alien's furry face.

"Hello, my name is Francis Hammond. Who are you?"

"Mbly hesti seetir leesteest cammel."

Good one. Did he expect aliens to speak English?

The soldiers push everyone aside and make a grab for the aliens. But they hightail it back to their ship.