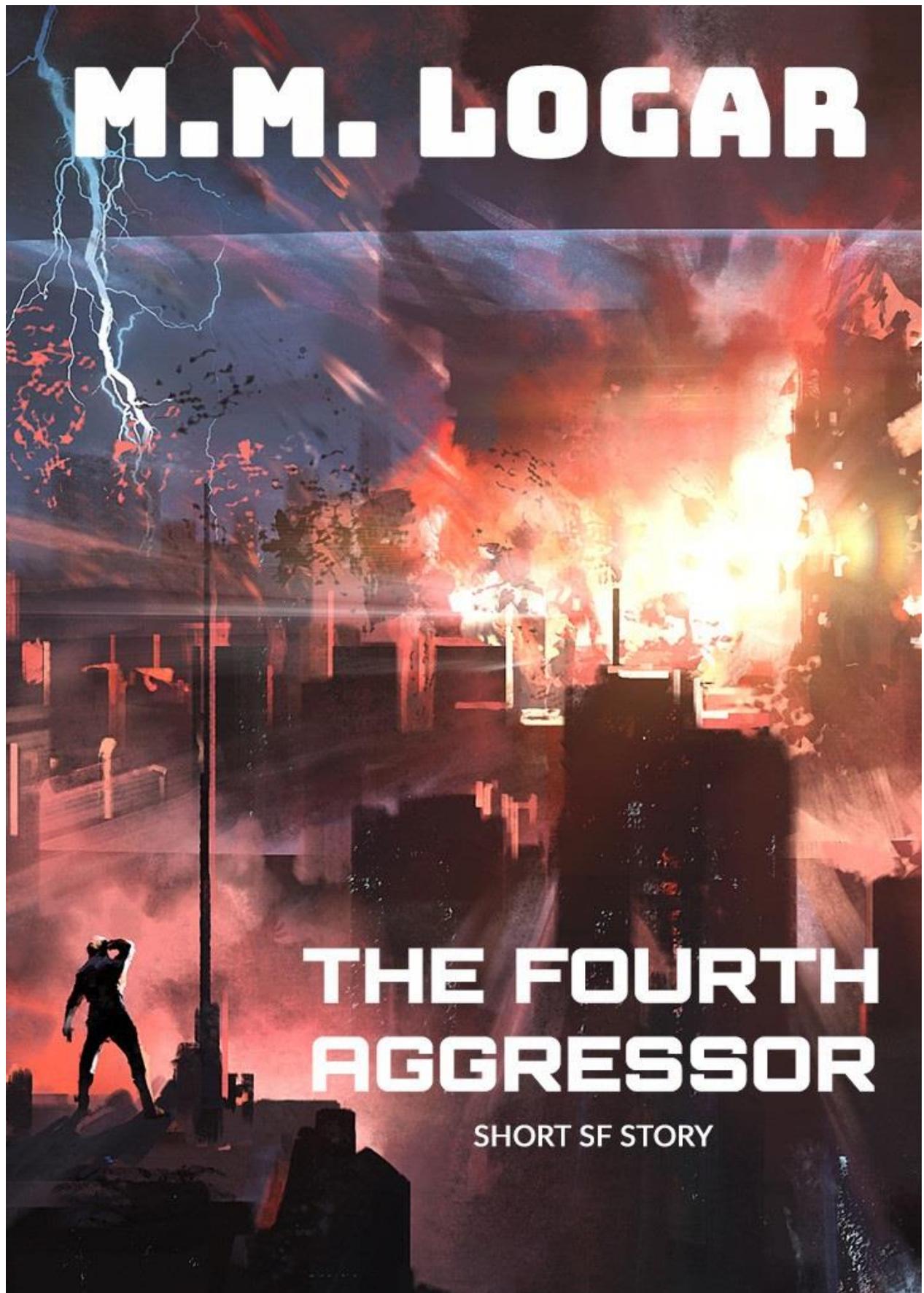


M.M. Logar



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The fourth aggressor

"I can't believe this will be my first lecture," Bob said to his friend on the right.

"I know Bobby, I feel the same, but can you try not to vibrate like a cheerleader?" His friend answered.

The great lecture hall of the Astro Diplomatic Academy was filled to capacity. Every seat, every step, every window frame was taken in anticipation of the lecture which takes place once every twenty years.

Lecture podium hesitated for a brief moment, it offered some static to the viewers, and then three dimensional letters suddenly occupied the space - PLEASE STAND BY.

The transmission was about to start. The hall was excited and buzzed.

A man materialized. For a long minute he was frozen like a doll on a string and then it gained life.

"Hello. Hello. Can you hear me....oh, I can see you now. Seems like we finally established a working connection."

The lights in the hall dimmed which made the translucent man more visible.

"As most of you know, this is just my representation, how I used to look while I still had a body." He chuckled.

"I must say that, although I can't see with my own eyes anymore, it is a wonderful feeling to see you all. Being with humans brings me enormous joy, even if it is once every twenty years."

The hall applauded.

"Let us not waste any more time. I always start with a formal introduction, I disregard the fact most of you know more about me than myself."

He made a brief pause.

"My name is Alen Trent. I am currently a digital captive of the Whee collective. I am a former student of the same Academy you are attending right now, and I was a member of the Earth diplomatic effort to negotiate peace during the first Whee war. I am here today as a fellow diplomat, to teach you about the Whee so one day we can put our differences aside. Every 20 years I am allowed to leave my digital prison to teach for a couple of hours."

He moved around as if positioning meant something.

"Let us start then. The differences between humans and Whee are so vast, that sometimes they are indescribable. Sometimes they are just weird, and this lecture is a good example. Erudition is in such a place in the Whee culture that they instantly approved my first request to teach remotely. They consider it to be a right. Imagine that, a right to teach, to pass on the knowledge. We would never allow such a thing, because we are aware that this communication channel, although monitored, might be used to transfer sensitive information. Just imagine if I

M.M. Logar

was a spy. My mind is currently digitally stored in the whee databases, and what if I was somehow able to circumvent my digital restrictions, the confines of my prison...and then send some sensitive data during an event like this one.

Let us recall all the defensive wars we waged. I will remind you at this point that our scientists did experiments that showed a six-sigma probability that the Milky Way has four aggressor races, which will compete for absolute dominance. Si vis pacem, para bellum. If you want peace, prepare for war, and we prepared.

When Traxians attacked we fought back and destroyed them in an unprecedented single blow to their home planet. Who even remembers Yattians, the evil parasitic race eradicated by our 34th fleet? One must admit that Xords took some time to destroy, but we prevailed. Since then, we explored the Milky way looking for a potentially dangerous fourth aggressor. That is how we stumbled upon the Whee.

The war started immediately, lasted for a couple of years but ended in a stalemate. As you know, Whee planetary shield technology proved impenetrable for us, thus the diplomats were called forth. I was amongst the diplomats, which were sent to the surface of the Whee planet to negotiate peace.

To this day, it is unknown to me what exactly happened, but our shuttle crashed. There might be some truth to what Whee are saying, and they claim that we tried to sneak in a reconnaissance spy drone behind the diplomatic shuttle, so they destroyed them both.

It was pure luck that I survived, a miracle even.

Again, the Whee have some strange rules. They all obey laws and rules; there is no crime in Whee society, no unlawful behavior. When I crash-landed, a single line of the law - which stated that no harm would ever come to a diplomat that touched the Whee soil, protected me.

They let me move around freely. I was able to survive off the land for almost a decade. I studied them, and concluded that they are a pacifist race, not interested in wars, and not even thinking about eradicating us. My luck ran out one day. I encountered something during my travels in nature, a fungus I guess. It destroyed my lungs. While I was on my deathbed the Whee representative offered to digitize my consciousness, which is an honor offered only to the most deserving members of the society, often the best scientists.

You guessed it, I said yes. That's how I am here today to tell you about this fascinating race of aliens, and to remind you never to forget who you are and where you came from."

He looked into the ceiling and continued.

"You may commence the attack, the shields are down."

The hall stirred.

"Please do not be alarmed," he said "this has nothing to do with you, this was my signal for our fleet it just means the lecture will be a bit shorter this year."

He laughed.

M.M. Logar

“This is the biggest lesson for you, future diplomats. Your mission never ends, and mine was to find a way to destroy the shield. The fact that my body failed did not stop me, in fact it helped me finish my mission. It took 200 years for me to find a way to disable the shields, and each time I held one of these lectures I transferred new data to Earth Command. As we speak our ships are carpet bombing...it will all end soon, my existence will stop soon.”

Bob raised his trembling hand.

“Oh, a question. Please young sir, let me hear it.”

“I...well, I don't understand why are we destroying the Whee? You said that they are a race of law-abiding scientific pacifists.”

“Oh my boy, that is because we are the fourth aggressor...”

The projection suddenly stopped and lights returned to the hall.