



# Act V Scene 2

Attila awoke to the sound of phones ringing.

“Huh? Lara? Hello? Hey?”

He rubbed his eyes and allowed the fluorescent light of the facility to flush the drowsiness from his body.

No Lara, he thought. How peculiar...

Slapping himself awake from his slumber, Attila shifted himself to the front of his seat — a very comfortable office leather chair, he found — and glanced around.

Green. Mint green. Sick green. On all sides.

Thankfully, some of the vile walls had been covered with a number of memorandums, post-it notes, and informative posters.

Attila, however, still felt a little nauseated at the gaudy colour scheme of the walls in front of him, and he swivelled his chair to find something more pleasant to look at.

He found himself staring at an empty office. Phones continued to ring.

He was in... a call centre of some sort?

Uncertain about the setting, Attila inspected himself. First his hands, and then the rest of his body. He was wearing a lab coat of some description, with a name tag and an array of pens, pencils, and markers positioned in his right breast pocket. He picked a pen out and looked it over.

BRRRRING. BRRRRING.

The sudden ringing startled Attila, and he dropped the biro. And, just like all stationery typically does, it rolled its way into some inaccessible crevasse, forever lost from the realms of men.

BRRRRING. BRRRRING.

The phone was vibrating more and more vigorously, threatening to fall right off of the hook with each ring.

Abandoning his search for the pen, Attila picked up the phone.

“Hello?”

There was a crackle and a brief silence.



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“Finally! Dispatch. Do you copy?”

“I’m not a disp—”

“We have a code green — I repeat, a code green — situation in Oceania.”

Attila glanced up at one of the administrative documents stapled rather crudely to the cubicle wall. It dutifully informed him that a ‘code green’ corresponded to an order for a quarantine.

Abandoning his futile attempts at explaining himself, Attila sprang into action, responding to the call of duty.

“Right. Okay. Quarantine order. Roger that.”

The mystery caller continued in his frantic and raspy voice.

“Send the team out to 36.07°S, 146.91°E.”

Attila reached for a pad of sticky notes helpfully positioned to his right. Peeling a sticky note off, he proceeded to rummage through his breast pocket for a pen. Realising that he had dropped his only biro, he cursed, before settling for a fine-liner.

“And tell them it’s a Level 4 situation, because it sure is grim and gory right at the moment.”

A bloodcurdling scream came across the receiver, as if punctuating the point. Attila could hear shouts of “FALL BACK! FALL BACK!”

“Uhhh, Dispatch? I’m afraid I’m gonna have to hit pause on our conversation... We’ve got a bit of a situation over here. Over and out.”

And before he could respond, the line had dropped out, and Attila was alone once more.

Alone, he thought. How... odd.

Having shared in so many adventures with his protégé, Attila felt a pang of loneliness that he had not experienced for quite some time. It was an ill-defined and amorphous feeling — Attila could feel where it started but not where it would end. It pooled inside of him, yet it made him feel empty. Chillingly, he realised that it was the thought that nobody might ever interact with him in the same way ever again until his passing. It confined him. It burdened him. And it didn’t settle right.

“Lara... Where in the world could you possibly be?” he wondered aloud.

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The little girl knelt and examined her father. Tenderly, she reached out to clasp his right hand, only to lurch back in shock at how hot it was. Her father let out a scream and recoiled at this gentlest of touches. His shock was for an entirely different reason — ravaged by virus and rapidly losing nerve control, any environmental insult would send his sensory neurons into overdrive, adding the torment of pain and agony onto his list of rapidly-growing afflictions.



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Lara sighed. Given the man's state and her complete lack of qualifications, there was nothing more that she could do except keep watch and keep company.

And it was heart-wrenching.

For a daughter to see her father in such a way was... devastating. A twist of fate made particularly cruel by the fact that there could be no physical contact until the grisly end. The father would have no hand to hold. No realisation that his daughter was beside him. No companionship. No support. No closure.

Lara, feeling particularly lachrymose at the sorry sight, turned to blink away the tears and regain her composure. And, by the time she turned back, the moaning had stopped.

The suffering had been silenced.



## A WHOLE NEW BALL GAME

