

**STRAIN**

**A TREATMENT FOR A MOTION PICTURE SCREENPLAY**

**by**

**JAMES MCGHEE**

**May, 2014**

1982

#### VICTOR BLANCO OBSERVATORY, CHILE

It is about 3:00 a.m. and Astronomer Donald Chapman is watching TV and eating dinner in the lab. The telescope audibly alerts that its scan has completed for the night. He brings up the color images on the computer of the last scan. He scratches his head and notices that the program has highlighted unusual movement within the solar system. He hesitates, "How the hell did we miss this?" Chapman gets up and runs out of the lab, and outside to grab his two colleagues. He wakes them in a panic and drags them into the lab to see what the telescope has found. The other astronomers can't believe what they're seeing. Chapman concludes that the anomaly could be a sentient mass based on its movements. They decide to notify the government in Washington D.C.

The cautious government in D.C. agrees to fund Donald Chapman and his colleagues for another year after they report the mass. Approximately one week later, Colonel Keller sends a small team down to investigate the mass with further research and equipment. The lead astronomer from D.C., Captain Lynch orders that all data be relayed to him. He and his crew of three cosmologists work around the clock for a week straight to gain evidence as to what the mass is but the results point to a celestial mass of debris and ice. Coined A-61, the team from Washington calls it quits once the cloudy mass begins to reverse its course and move back into the Kuiper Belt. Colonel Keller and his crew head back to Washington while the crew goes back to work on additional projects. Funding for A-61 is pulled and forgotten about.

1997

#### GEMINI OBSERVATORY, CHILE

Dr. Reagan Durso, a cosmologist, is finishing his final local planetary scans for the night when one of the satellites linked with the telescope trips an alarm highlighting movement between Neptune and Uranus. Reagan runs over to see that there is an area highlighted and listed as A-61. He runs a search in the computer for A-61 but nothing comes up. Stunned, he says to himself, "Okay, so you're not even on the government's drive. Let's see if you even have a file in

here." Reagan goes over to the old filing cabinet and starts searching for A-61. He eventually finds the file on the mysterious mass and begins reading Donald Chapman's research on the project. Within minutes he rushes over to his colleague Melanie and shows her what Gemini picked up. They both stare in shock at the monitor as it reads the speed, size, and heat signature of the mass. Reagan calms Melanie down and calls his lead, Dr. McKern. Reagan wakes Dr. McKern and explains that there's a mass heading toward Earth. Dr. McKern requests Reagan to head research on A-61, he assigns Reagan a facility and crew. Dr. McKern then notifies Colonel Keller about the situation, Colonel Keller responds with funds for prevention of any possible collisions with Earth from A-61. The funding helps create a research project based out of Jacksonville, Florida called A.P.T., Aeolus Preventative Technologies.

A.P.T., JACKSONVILLE, FL

Months after Reagan comes across Aeolus, he begins working on an idea that will prevent space-borne bacteria from contaminating Earth. As Reagan is working on a prototype for his satellite, Colonel Keller and Dr. McKern visit the lab inquiring about any new finds. Reagan delivers very unsettling news of the mass named Aeolus. He tells them that he's been able to retrieve high-resolution pictures showing clusters of what may be organisms within the cloud. The Colonel is very persistent in asking Reagan how much longer it will take for the mass to reach Earth. Reagan tells the Colonel that it will take twenty years or more for Aeolus to get to Earth at the rate it is moving now. The Colonel and Dr. McKern are dismissive of Reagan's answer and end the visit abruptly. Reagan sighs but shrugs off the Colonel's ignorance and goes back to working on his satellite prototype with his assistant.

PRESENT DAY

GAINESVILLE HIGH SCHOOL

Mace Winston walks out of class smiling. Random classmates and his friends commend him on his presentation on penicillin. Mace joins his friends Zach and Sean and the three of them discuss seeing the Aeolus cloud on the news. Mace doesn't have a good feeling about the

cosmic cloud. He can't seem to stop thinking about it. Aeolus is gaining on Earth and moving quickly through space.

#### SYNTHACARE PHARMACEUTICALS

Workers gather around the break room television to watch the news. The news anchor speaks about Aeolus now being only within hours' reach of Earth. One of the workers runs across the factory floor, up the steps to the Line Manager's office. He asks for Gary Winston, who is Mace Winston's father. The worker asks Gary to come down to the break room and watch the news. After seeing the news Gary calls his wife Alexandra Winston who is teaching at the University of North Georgia to check up on her but she tells him everything is just fine.

Mace's brother Christian is working in the city of Atlanta when suddenly he stops welding a pipe, lifts his mask and walks into the main street where he hears people yelling and screaming. A policeman tells Christian to head home and stay inside. A surprised Christian asks "What, why?!" Just then, a reddish shadow blankets the city blocking the sun and sending everyone into a panic. Christian quickly throws his tools into his van and with tires screeching, heads home.

Meanwhile, Mace, Sean, and Zach are walking home from school as the red shadow dims the sky over them as well. They notice people coming out of their houses and looking up to the sky in a panic. A neighbor yells to them, "Look out!" Mace sees a car driving right towards them, Mace yells to Sean and Zack to jump. They all dive onto the lawn at the last second avoiding the collision as the car hits a telephone pole. Mace and his friends hurry to get off the streets. They all plan to meet up at Mace's house. Mace heads home and throws his book bag on the couch. He calls for his brother, mom, and dad but they don't seem to be home yet from work. He then tries calling and texting them, but to no avail. He sees his phone is getting no service. He turns on the TV and sees that there are extreme traffic jams, accidents, mobs, and rioting in every major city around the world. He sees religious groups on TV picketing intersections. Mace sees some home video footage that someone took from Japan of a disfigured dolphin. The dolphin goes to attack a man and is shot as the screen goes black. Mace says to himself, "I need to get Dad."

Back at Synthacare, Gary tries contacting his family but can't get through to them. Gary doesn't like how he can't get in touch with them so he heads to the basement to gear up with what safety gear he's got and then he heads to the University to meet up with his wife.

Back at the Aeolus research lab in Jacksonville, Florida, Reagan hurriedly runs down the steps from the labs to the first floor and over to a group of scientists. Colonel Keller and Dr. McKern turn around and look at Reagan and ask him how much time they have. Reagan tells them to leave now because the cloud merging with Earth's atmosphere is causing hurricane-like conditions in some areas. The Colonel says to Reagan, "Doctor, these deformities and mass deaths...are these attributed to this Aeolus cloud?" Reagan replies, "Colonel, I addressed the possibility of contamination in the 90's. Your branch decided to pull your funding for preventative defense just four years after APT began. I can't help you here." The Colonel, now upset, asks Reagan for more proof relating to deformities caused by the cloud. Reagan proceeds to show the Colonel video and a live experiment using a sample of Aeolus and a goldfish. The Colonel now stunned at the proof Reagan shows him reaffirms his trust in Reagan. The Colonel and Dr. McKern board a helicopter and fly back to Washington D.C. Reagan and his assistants begin working to find an antidote to battle the toxic bacteria.

It's getting very late and the sky is colored with a dark red hue. Gary's wife, Alex, walks out of the University looking up at the sky as people scramble to their cars. Her friend Sue runs up to her and asks her if she's coming. She tells her friend no, that she is staying behind because she has a feeling that her husband is coming to get her. Her friend Sue heads to her car, drives about 15 feet before coming to a dead stop on the main road, the roadways are packed like a full parking lot. People are honking their horns, yelling, driving around each other. A feeling of anarchy is in the air, and Alex looks to the sky as darker red clouds move in. One of Alex's students asks her what they should do. Alex regains her awareness and she asks him to help her grab supplies from the basement. Soon a rumbling is heard, then suddenly a bolt of lightning, and following that a blood red downpour. Alex heads back upstairs to her class where about fifty or more students and professors are standing looking out the window at the people in

their cars. Sue puts down her window and lets the rain hit her face, she sips the red rain as it lines her lips. "Beautiful," she says.

Sitting hunched over looking into a microscope at the Aeolus Research center, APT, Stan suddenly jumps out of his chair screaming for Reagan that he's found the antidote. Reagan runs over to him but unfortunately it was a false call. The two go back to testing different medicines. Suddenly a loud bang is heard from behind the building as if someone or something busted through a door. Reagan looks at Stan his assistant and asks "What the hell was that?!" Stan tells him he's going to go down to check it out. They both notice the rain coming down hard outside. Reagan can't believe the cloud made it through Earth's atmosphere as it had been expected to burn up.

Stan heads downstairs to the warehouse area. He hears a noise from the kitchen so he walks in to check it out. Just as he opens the door a giant dark figure bursts through the door onto Stan, Stan screams as the figure bites his neck. Stan's scream fades into a gargle of blood then nothing.

Gary is in his truck and is the last one to leave Synthacare. There are no other cars in the parking lot. He has a lab coat on and a gas mask which he uses at his job. He pulls out of Synthacare and sees that many of the main roads are blocked full of traffic. He heads down a back road that dead ends to a drainage underpass. He busts through the gate with his truck and heads down into the drain way. Gary bursts through a tunnel gate and drives through the dark tunnel. When he gets to the other side he sees a ramp to go up. Gary drives up the ramp and takes more back roads leading to the college. On his way there he sees people lying on the ground, deformed and still moving and screaming. He then sees something huge in the form of a man run into a house. He accidentally hits something while watching the large human-looking creature go into the house. He gets out of his truck and is confronted by a dog-like creature. He quickly evades it as it lunges at him, running to the other side of the truck and getting in. He stomps on the gas and drives off, tires screeching out of the neighborhood. The mutated dog runs after the truck growling in frustration.

Mace and his friends, Sean, Zach, and Michelle are in Mace's garage prepping to head to Synthacare. The rain is coming down hard and the sounds of sirens and lightning are heard outside. They each grab a couple weapons and something to eat for the long walk ahead of them. Mace explains his plan to the gang, "...we stick together. I've walked to my Dad's work before, it's not that hard. There's a drain way a couple blocks from here that leads to an intersection about a mile from Synthacare. We'll make sure it's clear of any crazies then make our way there through people's backyards and behind businesses. There's no other option guys." Zach doesn't like the idea of walking five to seven miles in the toxin rain and elaborates how it's a warzone out on the streets. Mace tells him that his plan is to find his dad and come up with a way to destroy Aeolus. He knows his dad will help him out with the plan. It is their only hope and his only objective right now. His friends agree and are ready to leave. The group snap up their raincoats and grab their bags and snap on their masks. They pick up their weapons. Mace opens the garage door and blood red rain leaks into the garage. It is pouring down red rain. Mace leads them as he starts to run across all of his neighbors' front yards, keeping away from the roads. The group of kids runs through a red-shaded neighborhood with cop cars flipped over and on fire. They run by people getting into their cars and quickly driving off. Lightning lights up the sky bright red. From the distance the kids hear a low roar and a scream. They notice the screams and deep roars but keep moving, following Mace.

Mace's brother Christian comes flying down their road in his van and slides into the driveway. He gets out and shouts for his parents and Mace but gets no answer. He checks his phone but has no signal. He walks into the kitchen to find a note from Mace:

Chris, my friends and I went to Dad's work to find a way to stop this thing. Could not call you. If you get this note, come join us.

-Mace.

He goes into his garage and grabs a couple of lab coats and respirators. He goes into his Dad's safe and grabs his shotgun with some ammo. Suddenly he hears a car pull up to the house and he sees it's his friends and girlfriend. Christian tells them that he is going to find his brother. Dylan, Pam, and Chelsea come into the house and gear up with Christian. The four prep for the

storm outside with any weapons they can grab. Christian pulls the van out of the driveway and they head the same direction that Mace went.

In the meantime, Gary is driving throughout neighborhoods and business parks trying to avoid all highways. He gets closer to the college and just as he is about to drive across the overpass he sees a man shoot another man and then drive off onto the highway. Gary goes to check on the man that was shot. He hears a loud roar and then sees a huge dark figure stand up behind him. It is an Oler, a human mutated by the Aeolus bacteria. It growls at him and then lunges at him. Gary quickly jumps out of the way, he falls, he gets back up and makes a run for the college across the bypass. Gary gets to the highway barrier, climbs a car and gets over. He just barely gets into the University doors as the Oler bangs on the walls and doors of the building. Gary then gets to his wife, Alex, who is helping and treating the sick and dying. The two decide to stay and help at the university because they know their kids are going to try and find them there.

Mace and his group, Michelle, Sean, and Zach are finally walking up out of the drainage pipe and into a community when suddenly an Oler leaps out from under a walkway and onto Zach. Everyone screams and Michelle starts to cry, Mace swings and hits the oler in the side of the head with his metal bat. That doesn't faze the oler one bit. As Zach is being bitten in his left arm by the oler, he pulls out a butcher knife and guts the oler over and over in the stomach. Mace and Sean crack the oler in the head again. It then goes to lunge at Mace, but Zach stabs it one last time in the neck and leaves it in there as he crawls out from under it. Zach and Sean beat it down to the ground. The oler starts to crawl away but not dying. Sean and Mace help Zach get up who is out of breath. Michelle screams at the guys that there are two more olers running after them in the distance. Mace tells Sean that they've got to get going, Sean tells him he can't just leave Zach there. Zach tells them to go and that he's not going to make it. Sean tells Zach that he won't leave him. Mace watches as the two olers gain on them. With tears in Mace's eyes he sees a van come up behind the two olers with its lights on lighting up his tear-soaked eyes. He watches the van slam right through the two beasts and drive toward them. He knows it's Christian. Christian sees the oler attacking Zach and performs a drive-by shooting on it.

Unfortunately as they all try to leave together everyone notices that Zach is starting to mutate into one of the beasts. They reluctantly agree to end his misery. Everyone is saddened at Zach's terrible fate. Mace tells Christian that they need to get to Dad's plant as soon as possible to find a way to destroy Aeolus and find their dad. The two groups head out of the community and drive past people dying and all kinds of mutated creatures chasing after them. They finally arrive at Synthacare where Gary, Mace's dad works. They head inside and finding no one around, look for a place to settle down for the night. They make sure to find some food and plan out their events for the next day before they try and get some rest.

Back at A.P.T., Aeolus Preventative Tech., Reagan finally gets a bad feeling about Stan because he's been gone for so long. He tells all of his associate scientists to head home and be careful. Reagan heads down to the basement to find Stan, he then hears a crash of glass shattering upstairs. Reagan reaches the kitchen and sees blood everywhere. He goes through the kitchen door to the storage unit calling for Stan and he finally hears Stan. Stan meets up with Reagan and as they try to leave the giant oler that attacked Stan jumps through a glass window trying to attack Reagan. The two try running but the mutated creature slams Reagan against the wall. Stan gets away as Reagan tells him to grab his rifle out of the locker. Stan gets the rifle and shoots the oler in the back, the oler drops Reagan. Stan slides Reagan the gun and Reagan fires more rounds into its head. Reagan runs upstairs with Stan and sees that the entire lab is trashed and there are assistants dead and bleeding on the floor. Reagan grabs his blueprints for his preventative satellite technology. He and Stan head for Reagan's SUV and head off towards the Jacksonville airport so Reagan can get to Washington D.C. Stan has been injured and bitten badly by the oler in the basement. He is starting to change into an oler. Reagan is talking to Stan trying to calm him down, finally Stan passes out. Reagan keeps driving along the highway until he comes to a dead stop where the turnpike is completely backed up. Reagan gets out of his car and notices people scurrying about in front of him. He runs up to see what's going on then sees a car explode and people scream. Suddenly a thirty-foot tall red mutated creature climbs up onto the highway kicking and flipping cars. Reagan runs back to the car and doesn't see Stan. He hears a growl behind him and it's Stan half mutated into an oler. Reagan screams and cries as Stan tries to kill him. Reagan grabs his rifle and fires an entire clip into Stan's mutated head.

He grabs his briefcase and begins running away from the massive oler termed a "RED." Finally Reagan decides to shoot at the beast's ankles. The beast goes down and a man named Art O'Neill waves for Reagan to come over to him. Reagan meets up with Art and they jump below the overpass before the beast can get to them. The two hear planes above and directly after see missiles fly into the giant Red blowing it apart into several pieces. Art introduces himself as a policeman and introduces Reagan to his companions, some of which are his family. Reagan explains to Art and his family what they are dealing with, who he is, and that his mission is to get to D.C. so they can launch his satellite and end any more planetary decay. Art agrees to help Reagan and they begin walking towards a rest stop down the road. He tells Reagan that they may be able to hitch a ride from there. The group heads into the trees alongside the highway.

Back at Sythacare, the sun shines through the skylights of the factory down on Mace's face. He wakes up and sees his brother sleeping on the floor holding Chelsea, Dylan holding Pam, and Michelle snuggled up next to him sleeping. He smiles and gets up, gently putting his sweatshirt under Michelle's head. He goes to look for Sean. Mace walks upstairs to the office and sees Sean looking out the second floor window. Sean has spotted an oler that is wounded crawling across the parking lot. Mace tells Sean that that is the perfect specimen for his experiment. Mace intends to test different chemicals from the factory on the oler. Mace runs downstairs to the group and wakes them up by asking who wants to help him. Sean, Dylan, and Christian reluctantly agree to help Mace get the oler. The group then realizes they need Mace's dad's cattle strap guns to apply the chemicals to the beast. The guns are kept in the warehouse across from the building they're in. They devise a plan to get into the warehouse. Christian and Mace decide to go. They almost get attacked by Gnawlers on their way in. Gnawlers are mutated dogs or smaller animals. Christian gets into the building first busting the second floor window open with the butt of his rifle. Mace then comes in once Christian is in. The two get to the ground and then see two gnawlers make their way into the facility. Mace and Christian start opening boxes searching for the applicator they need to test on the olers. They finally find a bunch of them and open them up and strap them on, they take one more box in their hands. Suddenly the gnawlers jump down behind them. Mace and Christian whack them with a bat knocking them down while they run away. A giant "RED" is formed outside of the facility and

takes off after Mace and Christian. Pam finds some compressed canisters labeled penicillin, and a few more medicines. She runs over to Mace and Christian with the canisters and tells them that she found those in a refrigerated room. Mace and Christian screw in the canisters which fit perfectly into the backpacks connected to the guns. Since Mace covered his cut the Red lost scent of him, the beast starts to slowly walk around the building. The guys know there's a beast outside trying to get in. They think of a way to get out of the building. Finally the whole group is together and Christian is telling them that they need to find a place to hide before the Red finds them. Suddenly the giant Red bursts through the ceiling of the factory and lands right next to Pam knocking her unconscious. The falling debris knocks over Dylan and a few others. Mace and Christian scatter behind machines away from the beast. Dylan is injured and gets up screaming for his girlfriend Pam. Dylan opens fire on the beast but the beast just backhands Dylan into a machine. The beast then picks up Pam's body and bites down on her pulling her body in half spilling her blood everywhere. Dylan opens his eyes and tries getting up. He screams for Pam again and then gets up to shoot the creature one more time but Christian screams "Dylan No!" Christian stares at the beast and tells Dylan to get the girls out of the room. Dylan crying, goes over to the girls and helps them up and out of the room. Christian and Mace blast the beast with the penicillin powder and the beast goes down almost taking out Mace. The beast falls to its knees and starts to steam and boil. It quickly breaks down and nothing is left but a little muscle, bones, and a puddle of pinkish white liquid. The group cheers loudly, however, Dylan is heartbroken and shaken up over losing Pam. But there's no time for mourning. Two more beasts come into the building running at the group. Christian tries to fire but he's out of bullets. The gnawlers sniff the giant Red that's laying dead in the center of the factory. The gnawlers take a couple bites of its body then start to run towards Dylan. Dylan asks Christian if he should open up a clip on the gnawlers and Christian tells him to wait. The gnawlers slow down and start to throw up and cough. Mace screams for Dylan to wait and hold off. Michelle asks what's happening and Mace tells her that he learned in class how fast bacteria can spread, he tells her that the penicillin from the Red must have spread to the gnawlers. The group follows Mace into their dad's office to think of an escape plan. Mace finds an outline of the facility on his dad's bulletin board in his office and shines his flashlight on it.

He explains to the group just how they are going to safely get out of the factory. He shows Christian a safe tunnel way from the factory to the main public sewers. They all agree with Mace that his plan is the most efficient and safest. After all of the gunshots, screaming, and scents from the Red steaming into a puddle of blood the other olers and beasts from around the area are attracted to the parking lot and soon begin to bust through the factory doors and windows. The group gears up and grabs anything they can find to eat or use as a weapon. They head to the back corridor of the building and head down the basement steps. An oler jumps next to Chelsea onto a conveyor but Christian sprays it with the penicillin gun. The oler jumps away screaming then eventually falls as its body steams. As the group gets into the basement they are followed by dozens of olers. Dylan sprays the two olers coming at them with penicillin, they dodge the cloud and come around at them. Dylan runs to the back of the basement where Mace and Christian are trying to lift the sewer grate. Mace asks Sean for help, Sean comes over and the grate finally comes up. Mace climbs down with his flashlight in his mouth, once he gets down he steps in a foot of murky water. Christian then climbs down with Dylan's flashlight. Michelle, about to climb down feels something drip on her. She looks and it's a black substance, she looks up at the ceiling and an oler is on the ceiling looking at her. Suddenly, the oler jumps down onto her, Mace screams. The oler backhands Dylan into the boiler tank. Just as the oler is about to slash Michelle, Sean sees the rifle that Dylan dropped and empties an entire clip into the oler's chest sending it into a shelf full of chemicals. The chemicals fall and smash on the ground catching fire. The oler catches fire and roars at the top of its lungs, it gets up and goes to attack Sean. The fire spreads and the ceiling begins to fall. Dylan pulls the grate over the entrance as soon as an oler gets to them. The oler roars at the top of its lungs and the two climb down. As they are climbing down Christian hears explosions and tells them to jump. He tells them he knows the tanks down there are going to explode. As the two jump down into the sewer, the chemicals explode sending flames into the sewer as the group runs away. The olers are instantly killed and the entire basement is leveled. Debris is seen falling from above. Mace tells the group that they've got about ten more miles to the University. With the correct technology and antidote to take on Aeolus now, Mace and his friends may have a chance in saving humanity after all.

At the rest stop, only minutes from the Jacksonville International Airport, Reagan, Art, and the five other survivors are inside. They are all bloodied and bruised from being attacked and stressed from the run to the rest stop. Reagan is on the phone, Art is out front fending off olers and gnawlers as the rest of the crew are helping the injured inside the rest area building. Gunshots and screams are heard outside as a gnawler jumps through one of the windows and is then shot and dragged outside. Reagan is on the phone with Colonel Dougherty talking about how he's going to get to D.C. He tells the Colonel that he's got the blueprints and he's done more research to combat the bacteria. The Colonel tells him that the president is waiting and begins to give Reagan instructions until he hears glass break in the background. The Colonel calls for Reagan but there is no response. The Colonel hears roars and gunshots, still no answer. The Colonel stays on the phone shouting for Dr. Durso to answer, the camera backs up from the Colonel shouting Reagan's name into the phone. Screen FADES TO black.

End.