

Stranger in a Strange Land

By George Cunningham

I have this nightmare where I come from a planet, which we can call 20th Century Earth and I crash land on a similar, but different, planet called 21st Century Earth. The inhabitants of Earth21 are the same in appearance to the Earth20 inhabitants, except the Earth21 people are all younger.

On Earth20 people communicated by talking to one another. On Earth21, the inhabitants exchange ideas and concepts by manipulating small handheld devices which send short written messages through the air – kind of like a telegraph, except without the wires and Morse code.

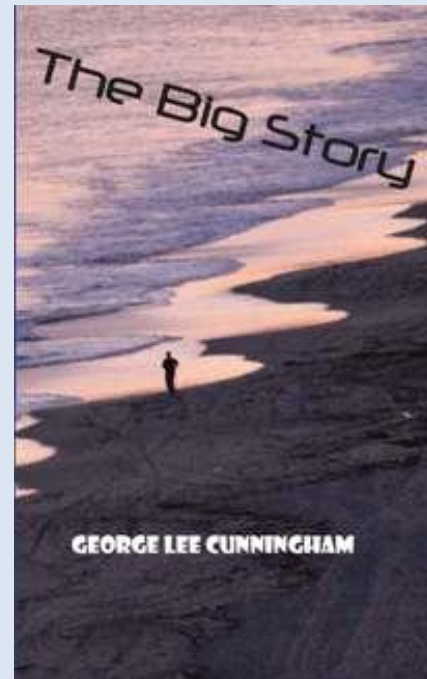
In my nightmare, I yearn to go back to my homeland on Earth20, but that's impossible. Once you crash land on Earth21, there is no going back. It's a one-way trip.

The real nightmare, of course, is that it's not a nightmare at all. The world I grew up in no longer exists. There are some buildings still standing, and some people from that world are still wandering around, but for the most part Earth20 is gone forever.

We survivors of the 20th Century live in denial. Sure things have changed, we say, but that's not necessarily bad. And it's not. No matter how some of us survivors try to sugarcoat it, the 20th Century was no bed of roses. But it was our century, and we felt comfortable there.

This is not our century. The aliens – who

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A hard drinking reporter has to decide whether to keep chasing his big story or to make his bosses happy, rekindle the flame with his ex-wife, and be a responsible adult. Guess what he chooses. Mobsters, corrupt police, sissy editors, and the body of a naked girl on the beach. What more could you ask for?

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actually sprang from our loins – have taken over and each day their control over the planet grows stronger. This was recently illustrated to me twice in the same day.

It started with my wife complaining to me about hashtags. In case you don't know what a hashtag is, it is what we Earth20 people used to call a pound sign. It looks like this: #. We also used it as a substitute for the word "number" as in I live at "123 Main St. #201." Now it's called a hashtag and it's used when you are tweeting somebody on Twitter and you want your message to be available in a subject file.

For instance, if I tweet: "*The #Dodgers is my favorite team. #MLB*" then my tweet is posted on the #Dodger file along with tweets from other people who are Dodger fans and on the #MLB file along with tweets from people talking about Major League Baseball.

"I'm not doing it," my wife tells me. "I don't do hashtags or whatever silly thing they want to call the pound sign."

"Why not," I ask.

She stares at me with that stubborn look she gets, which frankly is not her best look, and tells me: "Because, I don't want to. I don't like reading tweets with hashtags all through them, and I am certainly not going to start using hashtags myself."

"Never? You're never going to use hashtags?"

She thinks about it. "Maybe in two or three years, I'll start using them," she says. "Maybe not."

I absolutely understand. The poor woman is trying to stay true to the 20th Century as long as she can. I've already sold out, but not her. She is one of those people who don't forget where they came from.

Later that day, we're sitting in the Bun Boy Restaurant in Baker having lunch and she gives me that little nod of the head and eye roll that means "check this out." At a nearby table were a young man and a young woman, obviously in love, waiting for their food to be delivered. They were holding hands across the table, but they were not looking at each other. They each were using their free hand to text messages on what the Earth21 inhabitants like to call their "mobile devices."

We watched them for a while to see if we could tell whether they were texting each other or texting other people at other places in the world, but it was impossible to tell. Their faces were blank, and their thumbs were flying.

This is not an attack on the inhabitants of Earth21. Some of them are quite nice and very tolerant of our differences. Still, we struggle to fit in. There are people like us, people from the 20th Century, who no longer struggle, who no longer attempt to adopt the alien ways or relearn how things are done on Earth21.

They have banded together in self-created communities with names like Leisure World, Sun City and Vista Hills, where they can reminisce about the good old days without being constantly reminded that those days are gone forever.

Not that there's anything wrong with that. In fact, it's kind of quaint.

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