

A Parade of Horribles

Where Survival Became Entertainment

Lucien Vale

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Reader discretion is advised.

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PROLOGUE

THE NIGHT THE WORLD STARTED WATCHING

The first city disappeared at 7:14 p.m.

Not exploded.

Not burned.

Not invaded.

Gone.

One moment, downtown São Paulo existed in all its usual noise and exhaustion: brake lights bleeding across wet streets, helicopters above the financial district, exhausted office workers ordering food they would regret later, tourists taking photos, children crying in apartment towers, old men watching soccer in crowded bars.

Then reality folded inward.

Every building inside a six-mile radius compressed into a column of white static.

Cars vanished mid-intersection. Traffic lights dissolved.

Thousands of people disappeared so quickly there was no time to scream. Surveillance footage later showed pedestrians turning into clouds of glittering distortion before collapsing into nothingness, as if existence itself had buffered.

Three seconds later, the static vanished too.

The city block was simply... gone.

No crater.

No rubble.

No fire.

Just absence.

The internet spent eleven minutes arguing about whether the footage was fake.

Then Shanghai disappeared.

Then Lagos.

Then Chicago.

By the time governments stopped denying an attack was underway, forty-three population centers across the planet had already been erased.

And the sky had started speaking.

Not through speakers.

Not through phones.

The voice arrived everywhere at once.

Inside cars.

Inside subway tunnels.

Inside operating rooms.

Inside airplanes.

Inside people's heads.

Warm. Cheerful. Amused.

Like a game-show host trying very hard not to laugh.

“Good evening, contestants.”

Across the planet, billions froze.

Military broadcasts collapsed mid-sentence. News anchors stopped talking. Pilots forgot their checklists. Rioters stopped rioting. Children stopped crying.

The voice carried impossible clarity. Every syllable arrived perfectly understood regardless of language.

“Congratulations. Your civilization has officially met the minimum entertainment threshold for syndication.”

A pause followed.

Not a technical pause.

A dramatic one.

“As of this moment, your species has been acquired by the Broadcast.”

The panic truly began then.

Not immediately. Humanity needed a few more seconds to understand the sentence.

Acquired.

That word spread through the world like poison.

In New York, people began pouring out of restaurants and office buildings. In London, traffic locked instantly. In Mumbai, entire crowds fell to their knees praying. Fighter jets launched from air bases across multiple continents while emergency alerts screamed across every device still functioning.

None of it mattered.

The voice continued calmly, pleasantly, as though reading terms and conditions nobody had agreed to.

“Participants will now undergo introductory calibration events. Survival rates may vary according to adaptability, audience engagement, emotional volatility, and narrative relevance.”

A woman on a live news stream started screaming.

Not because of the announcement.

Because the cameraman behind her had suddenly split apart vertically.

Cleanly.

One half of him remained standing for almost two full seconds before collapsing in opposite directions.

The stream reached eighty-seven million viewers before the feed cut.

Across Earth, people began dying in impossible ways.

Gravity reversed inside sections of Tokyo.

A crowded football stadium in Madrid flooded instantly with black seawater filled with translucent things moving beneath the surface.

An apartment complex in Toronto transformed floor by floor into dense jungle while trapped residents clawed at windows as

unseen animals dragged people screaming into foliage that had not existed thirty seconds earlier.

Every event was different.

Every death was spectacular.

And somewhere beyond Earth, something was watching all of it.

Elias Vey first heard the voice while unclogging a toilet on the forty-third floor of the Meridian Grand Hotel.

Which, in retrospect, felt insulting.

Not the apocalypse part. The timing.

He had spent thirty minutes elbow-deep inside a luxury restroom while a venture capitalist from Singapore screamed about “customer satisfaction metrics” outside the stall door. Elias had finally managed to extract what appeared to be an entire hand towel stuffed inside the pipes when reality itself decided to collapse.

At first he thought the hotel fire alarm had malfunctioned.

Then every light in the bathroom turned blood red.

The mirror flickered.

For half a second, Elias saw something standing behind him.

Tall. Distorted. Smiling far too wide.

Then the voice arrived.

“Good evening, contestants.”

The words vibrated through his bones.

Elias jerked backward, slamming into the sink hard enough to crack porcelain.

Outside the restroom, people started shouting.

The voice continued.

“Congratulations. Your civilization has officially met the minimum entertainment threshold for syndication.”

“What the hell does that mean?” Elias whispered.

The mirror answered him.

Not verbally.

Text simply appeared across the glass in glowing white letters.

WELCOME TO THE BROADCAST

SPECIES STATUS:

NEWLY ACQUIRED

CIVILIZATION RATING:

VIOLENTLY PROMISING

CURRENT VIEWERSHIP:

8,441,992,201

INITIAL SURVIVAL ESTIMATE:

3.1%

Elias stared at the number.

Eight billion viewers.

“That’s not possible.”

The mirror changed.

CORRECTION:

IT IS VERY POSSIBLE

Then the screaming started downstairs.

Real screaming.

Not panic.

Pain.

Elias burst from the restroom into the hotel corridor just as a businessman sprinted past him completely on fire.

Except the flames were blue.

And silent.

The man hit the carpet hard, convulsing violently while glowing cracks spread beneath his skin like shattered neon glass. Hotel guests crowded near the elevators began backing away in horror.

A child pointed at the ceiling.

“Daddy...”

The ceiling tiles were moving.

No.

Something above them was moving.

The entire corridor bulged downward.

Then split open.

A mass of pale limbs came pouring through the ceiling in total silence.

People froze for exactly one fatal second.

Then the thing unfolded itself into the hallway.

It resembled a spider designed by someone who hated the concept of anatomy. Human arms bent backward from its torso in twitching clusters while dozens of blinking eyes opened and closed randomly across wet flesh that looked partially unfinished.

One of the hotel guests whispered, “Jesus Christ.”

The creature tilted its head sharply toward him.

Then text appeared in the air above it.

INTRODUCTORY CALIBRATION ENTITY

Audience Difficulty Rating: LOW

Viewer Appeal Potential: MODERATE

Bonus Multiplier:

ACTIVE IF CONSUMPTION OCCURS ON CAMERA

The creature launched forward.

The businessman nearest to it disappeared instantly beneath tearing limbs.

Blood hit the walls in a hot red spray.

And somewhere far away, impossibly distant yet horribly close, Elias heard applause.

Not from the hallway.

From beyond it.

Billions of people clapping.

Watching.

Enjoying themselves.

The hotel lights flickered again.

More text appeared across the ceiling.

TIP FOR NEW CONTESTANTS:

**RUNNING GENERATES STRONGER ENGAGEMENT
THAN SCREAMING**

That was the moment Elias understood the worst part.

Humanity was not under attack.

Humanity had become entertainment.