WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

 Humanity had survived many horrors throughout our history -- wars, famines, earthquakes, genocides, weather catastrophes, pandemics -- but now it confronted a potential worldwide, mass-extinction event.

 With little advanced warning, an enormous solar flare had suddenly erupted on our Sun's surface. Quickly, its released invisible energy wave raced through space at thousands of miles per second, until the powerful surge collided with the Earth. Our planet's Van Allen belts -- held firmly in place by our magnetic poles -- absorbed most of the invading radiation, but the remaining massive electromagnetic pulse still passed, largely undiminished, through that protective, natural barrier.

 As a result, every electronic device on the planet -- particularly the billions of computers and cell phones -- had their energy fields briefly magnified a crippling ten-thousand percent, the first time this unexpected phenomenon had ever happened. Simultaneously, every electric power grid and generating station worldwide was similarly affected.

 The effect was absolutely disastrous.

 Much like the classic science fiction movies of the 1950s -- whereby a land or sea atomic test explosion triggers an unexpected regeneration of dormant prehistoric creatures -- this new effect had caused a kind of time-space 'tear' or gash which altered our conventional reality. Now, mankind was shockingly faced with the existence of two separate but concurrent realities -- one visible, the other invisible. A new, complete reality had suddenly appeared, but the earlier, familiar one that had slipped away was just beside us, yet unseen. According to precise scientific calculations by the world's leading physicists, our former reality still existed, but it was currently untouchable. It was, perhaps, only a hair's width away...so tantalizingly near!

 However, it did not take very long for people to realize that the human race was now stuck in the wrong reality.

 The dire evidence that this new reality had gone terribly wrong was the outbreak of a deadly virus which was completely unknown to medical science. It infected and killed with alarming swiftness. World populations returned to wearing face masks, and social-distancing measures were revived by every government, but the disease kept spreading. Various vaccines were tried, but all failed. Millions died and more continued to die. World economies were shattered. Social unrest and panic skyrocketed as populations felt hopeless and helpless. Political leaders desperately conferred, bringing in their best doctors and scientists. Ultimately, the World Health Organization in Geneva had no answers, nor did the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta. People poured into churches, temples, mosques, and synagogues for the first time in many decades, seeking spiritual solace and any shred of reassurance. Our survival as a species was looking more and more doubtful by the day.

 Leading physicists theorized that if we could only replicate the brief but enormous electromagnetic surge cause simultaneously around the globe, we might be able to slip back into our previous, much more favorable reality, and return to normalcy. But the existence of the killer virus was an additional problem. If we could somehow 'slip back,' how could we do it safely and not bring the horrific contagion with us?

 Meanwhile, top astronomers who specialized in sunspots saw the early formation of various-sized solar flares on the Sun's surface. Their best guess was that in an estimated fourteen months, a large enough solar flare just might be generated, then explode -- propelling once again the necessary electromagnetic force wave towards Earth.

 While this hypothesis was being investigated, the world's medical experts reported that over three billion of the Earth's population (out of eight billion) had perished over the course of the past eighteen months. Projecting ahead another fourteen months, they predicted that another 2.73 billion people would also die. But if something dramatic could be tried -- and if it succeeded -- over two billion lives could be saved and humanity itself would survive. If not, they formulated then sadly announced, the human race would become extinct within 2.32 years.

 The combined scientific community, therefore, had fourteen months to figure out precisely what to do to avert mankind's ultimate disaster.

 After several weeks of agonizing brain-storming, theoretical disregards, and heated arguments, the world's best minds at last came up with an idea. They hoped against hope that it would work. It simply HAD to work, or we were all doomed!

 An injection was developed and tested which would safely put every human being on earth into a seven-day hibernation sleep -- to be administered in as much of a quarantine environment as possible, such as simply staying at home with one's family indoors. In studying the virus, it was learned that it had a seven-day life span once it entered the body. The virus exhibited no symptoms for its first three days, then it killed you four days later. But if it had no new hosts to invade, the deadly virus would run its course and theoretically annihilate itself and vanish. This is how other pandemics in history had ended.

 The next stage was to incorporate all artificial intelligence systems into a vast network that connected every electronic device on the planet -- every computer, cell phone, microchip, electric power grid, etc. While humans were in their hibernation, the robotic network would engage every single electronic switch at the same time, worldwide, at their maximum output -- at the exact instant that the solar flare was estimated to strike the Earth.

 The desperate hope was that the immense combination of both huge electromagnetic forces would shock the two concurrent realities into seismic reversal, thus restoring the normal, earlier reality back into existence.

 Of course, it was understood that some people would never wake up from their drugged hibernation, if they had already contracted the virus but were asymptomatic before receiving their sleep injection. But with time running out, there was no viable alternative to try. At least those poor souls would die painlessly in their sleep. Doctors estimated that roughly 8% of people would be thus affected.

 The astronomers, meanwhile, carefully monitored the solar surface as the fourteen-month solar flare estimate approached. Finally, they had an exact time calculated.

 It was an eerie thought for many that human beings were completely giving their trust over to artificial intelligence machines. What if the robots decided to simply let their 'creator- masters' die off by not turning on the switches, and hence rule the world for themselves alone? But again, mankind had no alternative. We had created such clever machines, so now human beings would hopefully reap -- in a beneficial way -- what they had sown...or maybe not.

 It was now or never when the big day arrived. Hibernation injections were administered three days before the date. If all went well, four days later, mankind would wake up back where it was before -- the killer virus gone, the world ready to be rebuilt. It would be much better this time, everyone vowed. No more wars, no more poverty and hunger, no more environmental degradation, no more fear or prejudice. Peace.

 The mighty orange Sun erupted its unimaginably tremendous solar flare explosion at the correctly estimated moment. The tsunami of its electromagnetic energy wave soon hurtled through the stark, inky blackness of space towards the anxious, waiting, and prayerful Third Planet...

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

 October 15, 2020