

SILICON BAY

A Novel

by

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EXCERPT and SYNOPSIS

Chapter 1

The impact was far more intense and the consequences far more catastrophic than most observers and predictors had imagined. The stratospheric split into three large bolides and countless smaller fragments had always been a concern, particularly to our colleagues in Barcelona and Chelyabinsk, but what differences all that made for life on planet Earth, would be something for others to argue about in years to come. Not now, in the days immediately following what many were calling the End of the World (it was definitely not), the End of Civilization (also not quite, but arguably so in certain “mainstream” respects), and the biggest single Event in perhaps 70,000 years or more, affecting all of humanity and a huge number of other species living on the planet (which it clearly was).

I was sitting in the ASTRIC Laboratory at the time, along with dear friends and colleagues, watching what we had hoped for the past three decades of dedicated efforts could have been avoided. There were six of us from the project team, all of us together, along with some friends and close relations. We knew well in advance that where we were, in this outback of a small town in northern Michigan, was decidedly not in the zone of probable impact, but of course we could only speculate upon the geological and meteorological consequences, especially those that we knew would evolve over minutes, hours, days, and longer, from whatever would happen. We were long past the point of “What could we have done differently” thinking, and totally focused upon what we knew would be the consequences and needs of people after the inevitable impact.

On the large screen in the center of the room we had seen the tracking for hours and then the final approach, the penetration into the upper atmosphere, and then the predicted but totally uncertain fragmentation into three huge mega-rocks that we knew would reach Earth's surface, and in that last minute and a half, it became instantly clear where the final impacts would be.

This was certainly a “Hand of God” series of events that would occupy minds and souls for centuries, an absolute Game-Changer for humanity, but right now and for all foreseeable future, what mattered was how we all were going to respond. And as we were about to learn, things would only be getting more serious, more apocalyptic, than almost all of the predictor models had indicated.

Just thinking about how, with a fraction of the capital and wealth that was just vaporized, just a less-than-one-percent piece of what had gone into some of the superyacht and mega-mansion playtoys of the neo-rich oligarchs, all of this might have been avoided – these thoughts none of us could harbor and dwell upon now, anymore, because the worst of all our fears had materialized before our eyes, and now all that mattered was survival and sustainability, and how to respond, how to serve, how to help...

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The narrator is one of the co-founders of the ASTRIC Project for intelligent control of space-based remote robotics. ASTRIC is a project targeting, among other tasks involving complex collaborative missions using robots and human-controlled devices, the reconnaissance, intervention and engineering required to divert potentially hazardous asteroids from collision and impact with Earth and other key locations. The ASTRIC project started years ago, in the 1990s, the brainchild of several scientists and pioneers in physics, astrophysics, and space sciences. Slowly and under great duress from lack of institutional, corporate or governmental support, it continued its research which became increasingly focused upon the critical problems of cybernetics, control, optimization and collaborative systems, and important new technologies were developed for use in such space missions and earth-based applications as well for agriculture and environmental tasks. However, despite much efforts, ASTRIC was ignored by major governmental space agencies such as NASA and ESA, and by private corporations such as Boeing, SpaceX and others during the critical first two decades of the 21st century.

ASTRIC proceeded with major commitments and efforts by a small group of scientists and engineers, particularly from Europe and Russia. However, because of the lack of sufficient support, it was not possible to implement the full ASTRIC network of robots and other space vehicles necessary to perform trajectory changes on asteroids approaching and passing by Earth, including the large and serious-threat asteroid known as Apophis.

The novel opens with a group gathered together and observing what has happened on Easter Sunday, the 13th of April, 2036, when the Apophis asteroid collided with Earth, its three largest fragments impacting in California, Washington, Nevada and causing a cascade of catastrophic events. Among these, as a consequence of the largest impact at the southern end of San Francisco Bay, was the creation of an impact crater so large that it later became known as Silicon Bay. Virtually all of the region once known as Silicon Valley had been obliterated by the massive impact and the geological consequences that ensued.

The novel then proceeds to describe the after-effects around the world from this catastrophe, through the experiences of the narrator and his associates, in a drastically and severely changed world where the fundamental economies and also technologies such as the internet have been essentially eradicated due to the impact and follow-on events including major earthquakes, massive dust clouds, climate upheavals, and social chaos spanning all continents and nations. Most of the events accounted in the novel take place in the United States, central Europe, and Russia.

While the novel is technically a work of fiction, it is also a clear and scientifically grounded depiction of future events as they are very likely to occur within coming years and in particular within the scope of the novel, by the year 2036. The novel has been written not for literary entertainment but for education and for generating support for the ASTRIC Program, which continues with full dedication and commitment by those who understand both the risks and the potentials for averting such a global and complete cataclysm.