

Observation Notes on the Effects of the *Vespa Mandarinia*

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1. There has been a high demand for entomologists to find a way to stop the infestation of giant brown Asian murder hornets throughout Seattle. First sighting appeared in Osaka, Japan, and then spread across Asia. These insects are the size of a mango, with the wingspan of a sparrow that can be heard from a distance, like a fan blowing at you during a humid summer. Sometimes mistaken for a bird. And fatal too. Their stinger, two inches long, can cause severe reactions: face bloating, hives rising, boils pulsating the insides of the mouth and the tongue. Sometimes victims die before they can even be taken to the hospital, their bodies carried in plastic bags by people wearing large white astronaut-like ensembles. “It’s preventable,” my advisor says, handing me a list of anti-hornet suits to buy. “We just need to find the hornets’ nest before they kill the honeybees and attack people.”

2. For weeks, the giant hornets are everywhere: they fly out from trash cans, latch onto people’s faces, cover cars from the bumper to rear, crawl through the crevices of houses and attack families. They fill in the roads and even linger around stoplights. They swarm on buildings, sticking themselves to glass windows for hours and hours. People rush into Walmart and Home Depot to

buy bug repellent: shelves empty within hours. “Dude,” my roommate rushes into the car, holding a bag of Repel 100 and Rapid, “did you bring them here?” I snort as I put my car in reverse, telling him that the joke isn’t funny. “But I’m serious—isn’t it a delicacy in Asia?”

3. My advisor takes out the anti-hornet suits from the Amazon boxes. He hands me my gear as I graze my fingers over the slick polycotton fabric. I pull the mesh veil over my face. It reminds me of *Rocket Man*. “Just like NASA,” he says, “One small step for the entomologist, one giant leap for humankind.”

4. Before I became an entomologist, I once worked at a restaurant called Water Buffalo Noodles, and next to it was a salon called Nguyễn Hair & Nails. The place was always packed with customers. People came in ordering large bowls of phở. They slurped rice noodles as they watched the latest K-drama on television. After their hearty meal, they would go and get a pedicure at the nail salon and come out with clean cuticles or various flower designs on their painted nails. Now I am at the restaurant again, but this time it’s empty, and yellow words cover the glass window saying, “U caused this u chink,” while the nail salon has deep craters in its window.

5. If there were a chemical that could stop the spreading of the *Vespa Mandarinia*, it would probably be DDT, but there would be too many consequences. First created in 1945, it is tasteless and colorless. It causes eggshell thinning. Bald eagles and other animals will become endangered again. Possible seizures and vomiting to humans too. There is too much risk. I tell this to my roommate, whose family hasn’t been affected by the infestation yet and are trying to prepare in case of an attack, but they don’t listen. They only listen to the politicians or they’ve heard from their friends who heard from their other friends that it’s the only solution. “Where can we buy the chemical?” he asks. “We’re pretty sure the side effects aren’t that bad.”

6. Climbing on the Douglas fir tree, I feel like I’m landing on Earth for the first time. My white suit covers me from head to toe, black boots help me grip onto the bark of the trunk, large brown sand gloves protect me from a possible hornet attack. And if I look to the horizon, I see only treetops swarming with hornets as a helicopter sprinkles white dust. It seems like a different world compared to the one below. I hurry and place the bait trap filled with orange juice on the strongest branches of the Douglas fir. Tug it a few times to see if it’s steady and then climb back down. The other entomologist and workers from

the Washington State Agricultural Department stare up at me as I descend the seventy-foot trunk—they look like termites surrounding the base until I give the signal that everything is okay.

7. The Seattle Chinatown-International District is now lifeless. Usually lively with tourists, customers gathering at restaurants, and arms full of takeout: now empty and quiet—the only movements are dim sum flyers dancing with the wind.

8. Maybe the difference between being an astronaut on the moon and one on Earth is how you see the world. On Earth, swarms of the *Vespa Mandarinia* decapitated all the honeybees stationed near the apple orchards and farms: their heads and abdomens disseminated on the dirt. There are even dead chickadees scattered at parks and playgrounds, faces swollen from the hornets' stingers, while headless squirrels surround tree trunks, tails ripped apart. It seems like these hornets are trying to destroy the world, but when I climb to the bait traps on the Douglas fir to check if we've captured hornets, they are drowned in the orange juice, some covered in the dried sap, unable to escape.

9. People love collecting dead hornet bodies after the spraying of DDT. They frame them on their walls, showing them off to the world that they survived the deadliest attack. Others collect them and scare people with them. "Eat this," some throw the motionless *Vespa Mandarinia* at elderly Asian men and then run away.

10. "The government is behind this," my roommate says, showing me an influencer that is decoding the secrets of why this infestation is happening, "or maybe it's a sign from God—he's punishing us, and the apocalypse is coming. That has to be it. Right?" I remain quiet, sipping my coffee as I read an article about the polar ice caps melting and polar bear bodies floating in the sea.

11. Sometimes I have to remind my parents that they shouldn't believe everything they hear from their friends or online. "It's bioterrorism," my dad says as I walk with him into the backyard. "Those Communists had to plan this all out." And I say, "I don't think it works that way. Trust me." But he never believes me, and he tells me again: Never buy anything from a Communist country—it can be poison, or they are trying to invade the country through their manmade products. I roll my eyes as he kneels in the dirt. "No. You trust me. It was planted in Japan." He sprays DDT on the lawn and then on his flowers. "They had to plan this all out."

12. Before we were able to find the dozens of hives of the *Vespa Mandarinina* and before we were able to trap them and place trackers on their bodies, people really didn't trust entomologists. I guess it's because the results were too slow. It took weeks to find the hives and another month to trap them effectively and another couple of weeks to show the results. People would come to the universities and throw rocks at the windows, some broke in, trying to steal our anti-hornet suits or anything that would protect them from these bugs as they destroyed our lab. Luckily, we had one or two suits left hiding in the cabinets, because every time I put on the gear, I feel safe, and I can breathe. Maybe because the suits make me blend in with everyone else. I don't have to worry about people attacking when they see my face.

13. Doctors are reporting that there is an increase of people being hospitalized due to the use of DDT: vomiting, rashes, and frequent tremors are the symptoms.

14. Out of nowhere, people start protesting about the outcome of the infestation. They're happy that the hornets are dead, that they can finally go outside without being scared, but they're mad at the use of chemicals to stop it. More and more people are reporting to the hospitals because there are large amounts of DDT in their bodies. People are scared that it'll cause cancers; others are pregnant and not sure if it will affect their unborn child. Animals are dying, especially the native birds to the area. Now environmentalists are working on cleaning the land and studying how much people were affected by the chemicals. I tell this to my advisor as he pushes the dead *Vespa Mandarinina* aside with his foot while we walk to the lab. "It's not like we didn't warn them," he says. "We told them it would be dangerous to use."

15. I guess this is the difference of being an astronaut of Earth instead of the moon: From space, Earth looks like a huge clear-blue marble, but here it's more like a large blueberry rotting with a white and gray mold day by day.

