

Chapter 1

The President stared at his Science Advisor in disbelief. “So, what you are telling me is that Kennewick, Washington, has been taken over by a bunch of space aliens.”

“Minervans, sir,” Dr. Beasley said. “They call themselves Minervans.”

“And who are these Minervans, and what do they want?”

“They claim to be refugees from oppression in the Central Galactic Empire. They say they need a place of their own, and since Kennewick is their ancient homeland, they’ve come to reclaim it.”

The President shook his head. “That’s got to be pure hokum.” He turned to his CIA Director. “Fred, what do we really know about these guys?”

Fred Collins was ready with his report. “OK, here’s what we’ve got. They’re human, of generally Caucasian appearance, but of a somewhat peculiar type, being all of slightly above average height, with medium build, gray eyes, brown hair, and high cheekbones.”

Beasley interrupted. “DNA analysis from hair fragments shows significant resemblances to sequences found among Hungarians, Finns and Basques. We’ve also identified some linguistic cognates to the same groups.”

The President was appalled. “A mixture of Finns, Hungarians, and Basques. How disgusting.”

Collins nodded. “Indeed. In any case, they landed about two months ago, and immediately started to buy all the property they could in Kennewick.”

The President made a stop signal with his hand. “Hold it Fred. I’m not following you. Landed? How? Buy? With what?”

“Apparently, they were delivered by starships of the Western Galactic Empire. They made their purchases with greenbacks.”

“Counterfeit?”

“No. Federal reserve notes. Legal tender.”

Phil Brasher, the Attorney General, broke in. “Legal, my foot. Their cash may be good, but those people did not go through immigration. They are illegal aliens, and their presence here is an intolerable, criminal, violation of American sovereignty!”

“Obviously.” Collins frowned, annoyed by Brasher’s emotional interruption. “But to continue, as soon as they got some land, they knocked down all the old houses and replaced them with 300-story high skyscrapers built out a kind of superstrong plexiglass. They then filled

them with fish farms, orange groves, robot factories, and housing. We estimate that they have about a million people living in there.”

A stunned silence filled the room. Collins continued.

“Their customs are odd, to say the least. They despise contemporary American music. Instead they like to sing in groups resembling coeducational barbershop quartets. They travel around on a sort of motorized roller skates that can move them at close to 100 miles an hour over flat or rough terrain, and they like to fast-dance in their skates too. Their society is egalitarian, but with divided spheres. The men own the property and run their businesses, the women control the government and religion.”

This sparked the President’s curiosity. He was a very religious man. “Are they Christians?”

“Hardly. They worship the goddess Minerva.”

The President was horrified. “Pagans! On our sacred land!”

Collins nodded. “Yes. And they get really nasty if anyone does anything to hurt an owl.”

The President set his mouth in a grim line. “Nasty, I’ll show them who is nasty.” He turned to Jack “the ripper” Ripley, his Secretary of Defense. “Jack, mobilize the armed forces. I want those pagans exterminated by Sunday.”

Ripley smiled a wolfish grin. “Yes Sir. With pleasure.”

Dr. Beasley seemed distraught. “Maybe we’re moving too fast. Certainly the Minervans are weird, but they offer a lot of benefits. In just two months they’ve restocked all the rivers in the Pacific Northwest with salmon and restored all the destroyed old growth forests. They’ve sent their doctors to San Francisco and Seattle and cured hundreds of people of AIDS and cancer. They’ve deciphered Linear A. Their materials science is incredible and they are willing to share some of it with us. Their technology could improve our industrial productivity and raise living standards. Their knowledge of physics, chemistry, and biology is phenomenal. We could learn so much from them.”

The President was decisive. “No. The only thing Americans need to know is how to be Americans. And they are not going to get that from a bunch of pagan foreigners from outer space. We’re going to wipe them out.”

General Smith, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, raised his hand. “Sir, what do we know about their military capabilities? If they have starships, an assault could be unwise.”

Collins cut in. “You needn’t worry about that, General. They have no ships. They’re just a bunch of refugees, dumped here by the Western Galactic Empire. As far as we can see, they have no weapons at all. Losses of your precious troops should be minimal.”

Smith seemed reassured. “Very well, in that case, I’ll order a simultaneous land and air attack for the first of May. One hundred squadrons and ten divisions should do the trick. We better warn the local American population to get out of town, because we are going to blast the place to...Smithereens.”

Everyone was delighted with the General's brilliant pun.

The President smiled. "You know, I think I see the hand of Providence in all of this. For the past several years, the American people have been depressed by the poor state of our national economy. Radicals have been spreading the lie that our hyperinflation has been caused by official corruption, denying its true cause, the failure of some of our people to follow the laws of the Bible. Now we have a chance to do God's work, killing pagans. This will bring us all together, and make us a happy, united, and devoted people again."

Everyone applauded.

"Speaking of hyperinflation," the President continued, "I suppose we're all due for another raise." He turned to Myra Chase, the Secretary of the Treasury. "Myra, have you brought the checks?"

"Yes sir, here they are," Myra said, passing the checks around the room. "Ten billion dollars for each member of the cabinet, and twenty billion for you, our beloved and infallible leader."

The President closed his eyes and pressed his hands together in prayer. "Let us give thanks to God, who has chosen to set our tables with this wonderful bounty."

"Amen," the Cabinet members intoned.

Collins spoke up. "By the way Chief, the House Minority Leader is threatening to publicly expose these bonuses."

The President raised a crafty eyebrow. "Oh? How much does he want?"

"An equal cut."

The President was outraged. "Out of the question. Have him assassinated. And kill his wife and children too. We can't suffer this sort of extortion."

Collins nodded. "Right. How should we have the press report it?"

The President turned to Lisa White, his Public Relations Director. "Well, Lisa, you're always good at this."

Lisa strummed her fingers on the table thoughtfully for a few seconds, then looked up. "I think we should have them say they killed each other. Dysfunctional family, that sort of thing. Make it really disgusting. That way no one will remember them fondly after they're gone."

"Excellent!" the President exclaimed. He turned to Attorney General Brasher. "Phil, have the Justice Department draft the stories for the different media outlets to run, with the usual minor variations from left to right, highbrow to lowbrow, and so on."

"No problem."

The President stood up. "Well, this has certainly been a productive meeting. I'm really looking forward to watching the massacre on TV this weekend. If any of you need to reach me, the First Lady and I will be vacationing at Camp David starting Friday." He paused. "Oh, that reminds me, we want this to be a fun weekend. Lisa, could you arrange for some of the White house interns to join us?"

"Sure, what type?"

“Well, as you know, the First Lady goes for blacks, preferably spicy ones with some musical talent. I think I’d like to try out some classic blondes, private school types, you know, the kind that come in those cute little uniforms.”

“I’ll get right on it.”

May 1.

Sergeant Andrew Hamilton lay motionless beneath the bush, his expertly camouflaged clothing making him nearly invisible. Slowly, silently, he unlatched the safety of his M-16.

The planes and helicopters hadn’t had a chance. As soon as they had come over the horizon, the Minervans had held up little gold balls that glowed for a second and then unleashed a barrage of lighting bolts, knocking everything that flew right out of the sky. The Army’s tanks had been wiped out the same way. But apparently the Minervan detection system only worked against machinery. Operating on foot, Hamilton’s Rangers had worked their way in, and were now within firing range.

It was going to be a difficult shot. The Minervans were always moving around quickly on those roller skates of theirs, and their clothes were bullet proof. The only way to get one was to shoot for the head. But Hamilton’s platoon were all expert marksmen, and they had a score to settle. Tens of thousands of American soldiers and airmen were dead. At least a few Minervans would pay the price.

A Minervan patrol approached, men and women dressed in black, moving fast through the valley. There were about a dozen of them; in numbers he had them three to one. M-16’s weren’t much of a match for Minervan lightning balls, but surprise was on his side. His men had been briefed. No one would fire until he did.

One hundred yards, fifty yards, now! Hamilton fired, and a split second later the whole platoon opened up. Blood sprouted from the heads of three or four of the Minervans, and they fell. The men cheered and kept firing. But then lightning bolts started coming back, exploding the guns in the soldier’s hands in rapid succession, right up the line. Hamilton let go of his just in time and rolled free, but the shock when his rifle exploded 6 feet away knocked him unconscious.

When he awoke he found his hands bound behind his back. A young Minervan priestess approached, holding tight the gold owl pendant that hung from her neck. “Why are you doing this?” she shouted. “You killed six of our people!”

Dazed, Hamilton looked to his side. The bodies of what looked like his entire platoon had been dragged out of the bushes and lay exposed on the grassy embankment.

He turned again to face the priestess. “Are there any other survivors from my unit?”

“Of course not. Now what do you have to say for yourself?”

He stared back at her in defiance. “Well, at least we nailed six of you.”

The Minervan shook her head in disgust. “You’re crazy, you know that. You’re absolutely out of your mind.”

The next day, the Cabinet met again.

General Smith gave his report. “The Minervans have counterattacked, and moved out to a perimeter of 50 miles around Kennewick. They’re holding in place there, and are offering a cease-fire. I recommend we accept.”

The President frowned. “Why? Why should we quit just when they’re losing their stomach for the fight?”

“Sir, we’ve lost over 1000 aircraft, 5000 vehicles, and 40,000 men. Our intelligence from Americans inside the Minervan occupied zone indicates that we have probably inflicted between three and four hundred casualties on the enemy. We are not winning this war.”

White House Chaplain Reverend John Meade interrupted. “I find that statement very objectionable, General. Of course we are winning the war. We are Christians, and therefore good. They are pagans, and therefore evil. Good must always triumph over evil. Therefore, we must always triumph over them. I would have thought that a man of your piety would understand that.”

Secretary of Defense Ripley nodded. “I quite agree. We’ve lost 40,000, but they’ve lost 400. That’s one of theirs for every 100 of ours. We can afford that easily. There are 300 million Americans and only 1 million Minervans. At this rate, we will defeat them by simple attrition. No wonder they are begging for a cease fire.”

The President bowed his head in prayer. “Let us all give thanks to God for this glorious victory.”

Everyone prayed, stopping only when the President did. Finally, the President turned to General Smith.

“So General, you were saying?”

“Well sir, what I meant was that since in the achievement of the glorious victory, we lost all of our best troops, including the Green Berets, the Rangers, the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions, and the Marine Corps...”

“They are not lost. They are martyred,” the Reverend Meade corrected.

“Yes, but they were the only units that managed to score at all against the enemy, and we don’t have them anymore. So if we are going to continue winning further victories, we need to regroup. The Joint Chiefs are all in agreement that a strategic pause right now would be in our interests.”

The President was incensed. “I can’t believe what I’m hearing. Forty thousand Americans have just given their lives in a holy cause, total victory is practically in our grasp, and you want to stop fighting?”

CIA Director Fred Collins coughed to gain attention. “Sir, my people have been working through Secretary Ripley’s numbers, and I believe we have detected a flaw in his logic.”

Ripley glared at the CIA Director. The pseudo intellectual sissies in the CIA were always trying to act superior to the Defense Department. “What flaws? We lose 100 to 1, but we outnumber them 300 to 1. We win. It’s that simple.”

Collins smiled his condescending Ivy-League smile. “Actually it’s not quite that simple. Certainly, we could win that way, but in doing so, we would lose 100 million Americans. That could significantly damage the administration’s public support.”

Ripley waived his hand dismissively. “Nonsense. We’ll just tell the press not to cover our casualties. Aside from a few heroic martyrs that we can play for our benefit, no one will know we’ve lost anyone.”

Collins shook his head. “I’m sorry. But it is the assessment of the Agency, that with 100 million casualties, word would leak out. The result would be scandal that would be used to great advantage by the radical opposition. You see, it’s an elementary problem in Threshold Theory...”

The President did not understand Threshold Theory, but his gut political instincts told him Collins was right. They could certainly cover up 1 million casualties, or 10 million, but 100 million was just too much. Even with a completely loyal media assisting him, word would indeed get out. The result could be a revolution that would force him to flee the country. While he had over 80 billion dollars socked away in Switzerland, that could all be made worthless if his successor continued his inflationary policies. For the good of his family, it was essential that he remain in office. He stopped Collins’ lecture with a timeout sign.

“So, Fred, what do you recommend that we do?”

This was the question Collins had been waiting for. “We need to use a more subtle approach. The Minervans only appear formidable because they have technology and weaponry given them by the Western Galactic Empire.”

The President’s eyes lit up. “That’s right! And didn’t you say that there was a Central Galactic Empire that hates the Minervans, and tried to wipe them out? We could go to them for support!”

“Unfortunately, that’s not possible. You see, a number of years ago, the Western and Eastern Galactic Empires allied and overran the Central Galactic Empire in a war. In the process, they rescued what was left of the Minervans. Now while they didn’t like the Minervans much better than the Centrals did, the allies, especially the Western Galactics, had made much of the oppression of Minervans in their war propaganda. So after the war was over, they were forced to do something to help them out.”

“So where does that leave us?”

“Well, now that the Centrals are gone, the Western and Eastern Empires have become adversaries.”

The President snapped his fingers. "I get it. Since the Westerners support the Minervans, we go to the Easterners!"

Collins shook his head. "We could, but that's probably not the best plan. The Westerners are more powerful than the Easterners, and if we brought in Eastern help that would absolutely cement Western support for the Minervans. They would bring in fleets of starships and armies of space marines. We'd never get rid of them."

"Then what can we do?"

"We need to undermine Western Galactic Empire support for the Minervans."

"How?"

Collins smiled. "Well, you see, Western Galactic backing for the Minervans is based upon the WGE's claim to be the defenders of the oppressed."

"So?"

"So we show them how in reality it is the Minervans who are oppressing us!"

"How do we show that?"

"They're invaders. We'll show the Western Galactics the millions of people they've made homeless."

"But they haven't made anyone homeless. Most of the Americans who were living in the Kennewick area before the Minervans arrived are still there, and those that moved out, are now living in Seattle or Chicago or someplace like that."

"Well, they shouldn't be. We don't have room for them anywhere but Kennewick. We should round up everyone who has left, and put them in refugee camps right on the border of the Minervan occupied zone. And we should try to get as many of the local residents who are still living in the zone to move out, so we can put them in the camps too. There is no reason why Americans should have to live under Minervan occupation. It's completely unjust."

The President nodded sagely. "I see. So then we invite in the Western Galactics and show them what is going on. How the Minervans have caused millions of our people to live in misery." He thought for a moment. "For maximum effect, we should try to make the refugee camps as squalid as possible. No health care, no sanitation, no schools, no trash pick up, no law enforcement, that sort of thing."

Lisa White, the Public Relations Director, now spoke up. "And we should keep any private charitable help to a minimum. Have them present, so everyone will know that the refugees are charity cases, but keep the amount of help small, so it doesn't undermine the image we need to project. If we handle it that way, we'll have the whole galaxy on our side in no time. The Minervans will never stand a chance."

The President smiled. "Excellent. Let's do it."

Attorney General Brasher stood up. "I'll have the FBI start rounding up the refugees immediately."