

## ENOUGH

“Enough!”

The command was expressed in over seven-thousand languages, reaching every human being on the planet – every race, color, religion, belief, young, old, fetus in the womb to Alzheimer’s patient in a death coma. Deaf, blind, both – it didn’t matter. The word was grasped and understood by all, accompanied with an image of a humanoid creature. Brown and deeply wrinkled, it was an ancient-looking being with a giant head and thin neck. The mouth was a tiny slit, maybe wide enough to manage a straw. Black, almond-shaped eyes that had a sheen to them like obsidian stared unblinkingly into the soul of the world.

Millions laughed, cried, screamed, gasped in wonder. Newborns reached out to touch the face, which seemed real, right there in front of them, or waved their pudgy hands to swat it away. Adults ran, trying to get away from the image that wouldn’t go away, running into furniture, clothing racks, shelves filled with cereal boxes, and each other. Pilots saw the face through their windscreens, millions of drivers above their steering wheels - more real than any instrument cluster hologram, and a billion more through their eyelids as they were jarred awake.

The thing spoke again, riveting everyone’s attention, its eyes glaring in anger. “We have had enough of your behavior!”

*Oh boy, here it comes...* billions thought. The aliens are here to save us and it's about time.

There were endless thoughts on what the aliens were about to save them from, as well as untold variations of similar themes: the whales; hunting whales; Inuits not allowed to hunt whales; whale meat vending machines in Japan; killing whales with HAARP; killer whales in captivity; orcas killing sharks; the dolphins; dolphins in canned tuna; overfishing; endless wars; politics; dictatorships; redistricting; stolen elections; voting rights restrictions; Left versus Right; Antifa; MAGA; Black Lives Matter; White Lives Matter; all forms of prejudice; cancer; Covid; bird flu; terrorism; the Israelis; the Palestinians; the Christians; the Muslims; children soldiers; pollution; no clean water; poverty; AI; robots; robots taking over the world; robots taking jobs; unemployment; no one wants to work; cryptocurrency; low birth rates; overpopulation; drug abuse; destruction of the rain forests; Russia; China; the Kardashians; an errant meteor striking earth; social media; inconsistent sizing for women's clothing; the return of clogs; the proliferation of tattoos; facial jewelry; porn; gay porn; gays; LGTBQ rights; gender equality; too much hate; too much love; school shootings; gun control; immigrants; the blocking of immigration; vaccines; thimerosal; global warming; coral bleaching; the melting ice caps; the coming ice age; the coming collapse of the ocean's currents; mega volcanoes; the decline of amphibians; the decline of Western civilization; the decline of TV content; commercials; pharmaceutical commercials; that Gecko; influencers; pesticides; colony collapse disorder; murder wasps; child brides; paper; plastic; the Great Pacific Garbage Patch; too much Jesus, too much Satan, too much JJ Abrams; Mexican gangs ransoming people for money; Indonesian monkeys ransoming sunglasses for food;

stealing natural resources; mineral rights; wrapping foil on your doorknobs; this one weird fruit; eat this to clear your bowels. The alien's words that they "had enough" was distorted through the prism of each person's own wants, needs, and desires. Whole world problems down to the most personal slight, grievance, or annoyance: potholes; no more drinks on the plane; cheating spouse; too many cats in Istanbul; the incessant barking of the neighbor's dog; the neighbor not cleaning up after his dog; the neighbor's tree dropping leaves into my yard. And on and on and on.

Native Americans rejoiced their Star Brothers had returned, while Southern Baptists and African voodoo practitioners alike believed demons were now making introductions.

"This has gone on long enough!" it proclaimed.

*Ok, end of war, end of poverty, whales...* Some had it right, but most were shocked by the creature's next revelation.

"It's the weight!"

Millions thought, *The wait for what?*

"The overeating! The increase in obesity! We have had it!"

Those in developing countries with high rates of poverty and hunger felt a sigh of relief. Whatever this meant, it didn't apply to the Vietnams and East Timors of the world. But the majority of the human population blinked in confusion.

"Not one country has had a decrease in obesity rates in the last fifty years. Over a billion of your species have hypertension! We've watched and waited for improvement

long enough. You have three months to lose weight and get into shape. If we don't see an increase in healthy living by ninety days, your world will be destroyed!"

What'd it say? Lose weight? In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, at least the aliens were worried about something significant like the spread of nuclear weapons. This wasn't even an aspiration for Earth's resources? It came down to fat?!

"We want the entire population to get to their goal weight. That means a BMI below twenty. For everyone."

Thousands of nutritionists gasped at that number. In three months? And BMI was a flawed metric!

Vietnam took notice. Although they were the least overweight country on the planet, two percent of their population fell into the obese category.

"We better see this goal met or it will be the end of your species!" The angry face and its unreasonable request clicked off.

The President of the United States was in the middle of his backswing when the face appeared in front of him. He duffed the shot, spraying sand across the green and sailing his Titleist 3 into the opposite trap.

"Cheese Whiz H. Kraft – what the hell is that thing?!" He immediately regretted voicing that he was seeing an apparition. Blurting out that you're seeing monsters is when they quietly relieve you of your duties as President and Leader of the Free World. The face was superimposed over the twelve-pin fluttering in the breeze.

“And that shot didn’t count!” he shouted to the CEO of Exxon who was sitting in their cart and staring open-mouthed.

The President, former Senator Huck Bisby of Alabama, a conservative Tea Bagger who came out of nowhere in the presidential field to take the presidency away from the Democrats and place it firmly back in the hands of God-loving, American Christian souls, climbed out of the sand trap with a grunt and held his wedge toward his caddy who was currently groping at the air, perhaps trying to touch the being.

Bisby glanced around at the security detail surrounding him at Augusta. The President had always wanted to play at Augusta. Now he saw they, too, were in various stages of confusion. One of the agents had his service pistol in hand, not sure what he was going to do with it.

“Put that dad-blang thing away!” When the creature was done with its threats, President Bisby turned to his aide standing at the edge of the green. “Albert, get on the horn with one of those eggheads from DARPA and ask them what the hell is going on.”

“I can confidently say we all saw the same thing,” his aide replied.

“Well, what the hell is it? Looks like an angry tortoise!”

“A tourist, sir?”

“Tortoise, you idiot. A turtle!”

Was it a vision from an angel? If so, then angels were a lot uglier than what he’d been taught in Bible school. And although he was mesmerized by the ugly being with the big eyes, the thing’s words still echoing in his head, part of him lamented the fact the

creature hadn't appeared to tell him the US would now rule the world, for reals. Was this really its message? Trans athletes or the rising crime rate didn't cut it? He couldn't accept the idea the human species was going to be punished for too many Twinkies.

POTUS tried to hand his sand wedge to the caddy again, and this time he took it. His dream of finally playing Augusta was realized, but his game was already falling apart on the back nine and then the appearance of the tortoise sealed it. "Albert," he said to his aide, "what do you make of this happy horse hockey?"

"Some kind of message, sir."

"I know that, you dimwit! What does it mean?"

"It seems to be a threat for all of humanity to lose weight."

The President, a man of faith and an avid supporter of Alabama's pecan industry who insisted on a slab of pecan pie every morning with his coffee, hitched up the fifty-four-inch waist of his pink and green checkered golf pants. "Well, I want that thing brought to the White House immediately! There must be some mistake," the President puffed. He was carrying over a hundred pounds of extra meat on his frame and was sweating profusely despite the golf cart shuttling him around and the endless supply of ice-cold Arnold Palmer's.

"Mr. President, we don't even know where it is, let alone mount a snatch and grab operation."

"Snatch and grab? You're a really ninny, Polk."

"Yes, sir," his aide replied.

“We need to get back to Washington,” the President declared and the entourage headed for the clubhouse.

On the way, he asked Albert, who was riding in a cart next to him, “Is there a way we can monetize this? Image in everyone’s head? What do you think McDonald’s would be willing to pay for that?”

“I’ll look into it, sir,” Polk replied.

Panic didn’t quite set in. The sky wasn’t filled with alien ships, blasting everything to oblivion. This threat was somewhat amorphous. Many thought it was some kind of prank, their video stream pirated by a radical environmental group who fretted over the ridiculous amount of cattle being raised for food and their endless farting which was heating up the atmosphere. The fact that the creature hadn’t appeared on any screen didn’t dissuade them from this conclusion. Millions, however, took it seriously, drawing up workout plans as soon as the image disappeared. Others went for the fridge. Food had been their friend to relieve stress and it was certainly needed now. And why did it have to keep shouting?

After two weeks, there had been little progress on the alien’s demands. Life went on, too many distractions, everyone basically suffered from their own ADD. The aliens decided to make a point.

Another vision, angry tortoise was back. Many continued eating.

“It is obvious you have not taken our threat seriously. We will now give you a demonstration of our resolve.”

The face was gone, replaced by a view of a Walmart from the parking lot. The sky was sunny. Cars parked, unparked. The view closed in on a bald man wearing a too small t-shirt that was struggling to cover his immense belly as he walked into the entrance. A middle-aged woman, as wide as the shopping cart she was pushing, waddled in behind him. The view zoomed out to the parking lot again, the entire store visible. The scene suddenly went white, like the flash of a nuclear strike, and a beam hit the top of the building, right by the air conditioning units. The Walmart exploded.

This got the world’s attention. Where did this happen? Why this Walmart? Why Walmart? Didn’t the aliens appreciate the value of low pricing?

“Jee-bus Cripes!” the President bellowed, jumping up from the conference table in the middle of his Cabinet meeting. “Was that in America? Damn it, tell me where it happened!”

The Secretary of Homeland Security spoke up as he listened to someone jabbering on his phone. “Reports are coming in it was McAllen, Texas, Mr. President.”

“Well, what in God’s name did McAllen, Texas ever do to the aliens?”

“Seems like McAllen has the highest obesity rate in the US, sir.”

“Gosh dang it, I want updates!”



After things settled down, President Bisby asked the Secretary of Defense, “Any chance we can get our hands on that doohickey? It’d make the Chinese more cooperative, I can guarantee that!”

There were only five survivors pulled from the rubble; a twenty-seven-year-old cashier who was an avid marathoner, three preschoolers, and a woman in her fifties who attributed her slim physique to forty years of smoking two packs of Marlboros a day. The woman, a skinny, fifty-five-year-old widow named Misty Hicks, swore in her smoker-gravelly voice that everything collapsed around her and she was protected by an invisible bubble, the hand of Jesus, she declared. She related this in a stream-of-consciousness burst of words, talking at high speed while her entire body jittered with shock.

After sifting through the debris, investigators discovered everyone who had died – a total of eighty-six people – had all been significantly overweight, including three close friends from eighth grade, fourteen-year-old girls who had been cut down while enjoying three Mexican Pizzas at the Walmart Taco Bell. People suddenly realized the aliens weren’t fucking around.

An emergency meeting was called by the UN president for all leaders to come to New York. President Bisby and Xi Jinping, still in charge of China, tussled over who should address the world first. After Bisby agreed to ease some of the restrictions on the sale of semiconductor technology to China, both leaders stood at the podium together. Bisby would speak first, followed by the Chinese President. After all, it was the US that had been attacked. They ignored Russia’s request to join.

The President had worked on his speech for a half hour, starting with “Dear World,” and not getting much farther before the Presidential speech writer took over and pulled together an appropriate statement. Bisby delivered his address in his familiar folksy tone.

“People of planet Earth,” he began, believing those first words made him sound like he, too, was an alien addressing the world’s inhabitants. “It is time we took the alien threat seriously and work on losing weight.” He leaned forward on the podium, hands clasped. “We all need to pull together,” he implored. “These alien fellas have made their demand and we need to do our best to comply. Here in the United States, we’re going to take the lead (Jinping side-eyed him) by ordering every member of our great country to assist those who need help getting their weight down. Neighbor needs to lift up neighbor, family member needs to cheer on family member. Co-worker, favorite auntie – it doesn’t matter. Get out and run. Do jumping jacks together. Walk, then increase your pace. We all need to do our part.”

Jinping followed up with a similar theme and the next day, the stock market crashed again, along with the sugar industry, which took a little bit longer as people cut down on sweets. It spelled the end for Hostess, CJ CheilJedang, Tastykake, Mondelez, Little Debbie, Hershey’s, Bimbo, Mars, Ferrero, and every other snack and confection purveyor. Doughnut shops went tits up. Ice cream stores briefly hung in there, courtesy of frozen yogurt, until people realized it still contained a fair amount of calories.

Health clubs swelled to capacity. Walking and running groups started. Bike companies couldn’t keep up with demand. Exercise equipment began to be hoarded and sold at immense profit until the President issued an Executive Order under Section 102 of

the Defense Production Act to end the hoarding and price gouging. Other countries followed suit, although in some of the Middle-Eastern and Asian countries, much harsher punishments were meted out for profiteers.

Across the world, unhealthy habits changed overnight. The amusing four-year-old from Samoa who weighed one-hundred and thirty-four pounds and had captured the hearts of millions on YouTube as they watched him put down servings made for two adults, had stopped overeating and was forced by his parents to hike daily with a backpack filled with coconuts to lose the weight. The Ton Triplets, whose actual combined weight was well below twenty-five hundred pounds and just had their TLC show renewed for another season, were filmed live taking slow walks around the block.

However, not everyone acquiesced to the alien's demands. The Saudis dug bunkers in the desert. President Bisby and most of Congress were secreted away in their own underground facilities made for nuclear war, but hopefully doubling as a sanctuary against the alien plasma ray. Other world leaders, especially those who were overweight, did the same.

The stages of grief were in full swing with the planet's populace. Millions were still stuck in denial, but many had moved on to anger. Had the aliens ever tried to lose that stubborn last ten pounds? Had they wanted to squeeze into a smaller pair of jeans and no matter the effort, couldn't do it? Why weren't they helping?! Their anger was directed not only at the aliens, but also at those they deemed responsible for this predicament – the obese. People who didn't need to lose any weight focused their rage on those carrying too many pounds. Overweight people were shot, stabbed, suffocated, poisoned, even decapitated in some countries, the thinking that one less heavy person would help get the

world to its goal weight. Murders soared. The US National Guard, already deployed and stretched thin as the country began to lose its mind with riots breaking out at sporting goods stores over the last weight plates and at fitness clubs over taking turns on the aerobic equipment, even clashed with police departments on jurisdiction. Many of their officers were out of shape anyway, so why are we listening to you, Chubby? This wouldn't do.

The President was briefed on the world's effort to lose weight, reports coming in on direct lines from the heads of Weight Watchers, GOLO, Nutrisystem, and Jenny Craig. Slimming World talked daily to the British Prime Minister. Herbalife updated the leaders of countries around the world where it did business. Technogym provided numbers to the President of Italy. Sales for PhenQ weight loss pills tripled in Australia. Despite the dramatic increase, it wasn't enough.

President Bisby threw the plate of raw carrots and celery his chef had placed in front of him for lunch, demanding a fried peanut butter and banana sandwich. He'd always loved Elvis, as well as his favorite snack. He addressed the Cabinet gathered in the Cheyenne Mountain conference room. "What are we going to do here, fellas?" the President asked, even though the Secretaries of HUD, Transportation, and Health were all women. "We can't let that pencil neck threaten us. Any suggestions?"

"Nukes," the Secretary of Defense offered.

"Ok, nuke where? We don't know where the damn turtles are hiding! Have we checked Earth's orbit? The dark side of the moon?"

“We’ve been in touch with every satellite company,” Baumann, the Presidential Science Advisor stated. “Every telescope on the planet, every satellite system of every world government and corporation has been scanning the skies. Even the Vatican observatory has been put to work. There’s no sign of them. Musk thinks they’re from another dimension, popping in and out of ours.”

“I don’t care what that nutjob has to say,” Bisby scoffed.

“What about under the ocean?” the Secretary of Energy offered.

“What about it? They could be down in one of them damn trenches and we’d never know it.” The President was clearly flustered. He angrily bit at his sandwich.

“The best we can do is get everyone in the United States exercising,” Jodi Albright, the Secretary of Health and Human Services, stated. She was pleased that, at last, someone had gotten Americans to start thinking about their health.

“Ok,” he said, wiping the grease from his chin. “I’ll do another presidential address this evening to get Americans to drop those pounds!”

The stock market plummeted even lower as world production slowed to a crawl. Many businesses shuttered. But the people did move. They kept running, biking, walking. Broadcast networks, cable and satellite companies, TikTok, YouTube - all outlets that provided video were mandated to run non-stop health and exercise programming, with live news about the world losing weight permitted, as well as the occasional episode of NCIS. Communities created exercise patrols to make sure everyone was moving. They also created food patrols to make sure there was only healthy eating. Random inspections were done, possession of a candy bar or fruit pie was cause for jail time with a minimum

of eight hours a day of exercise instead of cranking out license plates. Heart attacks and strokes skyrocketed as people who hadn't done more than the bare necessity of walking to the bathroom or out to their car couldn't take the strain of sudden, intense exercise. But the weight came off.

Still, there were many who didn't even try to lose the weight. *My feet hurt when I run, I can't breathe, it's no use, back to the TV.* And when the deadline approached, the tortoise appeared again, looking incredulous.

“We can't believe the lack of effort, even after our last demonstration! We warned you,” it finished. Sunny, cloudy, rainy, snowy – the weather didn't change, yet across the world, millions of bolts shot down from the sky like lightning, targeting individuals and everyone around them. People hid in their homes, their basements, underground parking garages, subway tunnels. Regardless, the indiscriminate plasma rays found them. A multi-story apartment building exploded as the beam reached one-hundred and thirteen occupants who were well above their goal weight, killing another hundred of the relatively fit along with them. Cars melted, bridges collapsed, churches made of centuries-old stone were flattened as if hit with giant hammers. Millions died, many in the best shape of their lives, as the first wave of plasma beams swept across the planet.

The President of France, who had moved his government to the Abbesses, the deepest station in the Paris Metro, was disintegrated along with his cabinet, security staff, attached military, and family members. The same was repeated with overweight world leaders from Korea, Niger, Brazil, and many other countries.

President Bisby ran down the hallway of the US Space Force Station located deep inside Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs, knocking senior advisors and his protection detail out of the way like he was William “The Refrigerator” Perry headed for the goal line. Even here, under hundreds of feet of granite, the plasma rays found their targets. Aides were zapped. Secret service agents, weapons out, disappeared in flashes of light. POTUS ran into the bathroom and hid in one of the stalls.

“Sweet Jesus in heaven, I haven’t asked for much since you granted my wish to be President, but I need a helpin’ hand here. The aliens...” The ray found him, crouched on the toilet seat so his shoes didn’t show below the door, turning him into a smoking pile of ash that fluttered down into the bowl.

When the sky stopped flashing and the dust settled, the alien reappeared. Many noted the presence of a sardonic grin on its wrinkled face. “Your progress is unacceptable. You have two weeks.”

The Vice President, a trim man of sixty-two who had been swimming laps every morning for decades, mounted the podium. “I regret to inform the nation that the President has succumbed to his injuries. I have spoken with all of the world leaders this morning and we are declaring war on the aliens for this unfathomable attack on our planet.” It was a great moment for humanity, many people wept with pride. But not knowing where the aliens were located, with not even one of their ships making an appearance, they had nothing to go on.

The hours counted down until THE DAY arrived. People didn't need to watch the live reports on weight loss from around the world to know they had failed. They saw it in their own neighborhoods. Everyone knew what was coming. At the end, many said "screw it" and ate everything they could get their hands on, knowing it was their last meal.

The aliens didn't seem to operate on world standard time. In the US, the rays started at 10:17 in the morning. Why not high noon? Even the top of the hour? And when the skies were suddenly riven with bolts of plasma, the rays so numerous they looked like one solid sheet of blinding light (there were a lot of targets, after all), what happened before, happened again. Buildings exploded, cars melted, people screamed, and millions were reduced to ash.

While the planet was getting incinerated, the aliens noted something. Many of the overweight didn't give up. In fact, millions doubled their efforts despite the world being destroyed around them. Wind sprints, more pushups, curling milk jugs, running up and down the goat path behind their home - a group just kept getting after it. This touched the aliens.

The tortoise appeared. Millions thought, *It's going to gloat. Well, fuck you!* But there was a gentleness about it. Perhaps its expression was less "glary." The alien seemed pleased. "We are impressed with the persistent effort in the face of death. We have decided if you continue on this path to health and wellness, humanity will be spared."



This, after entire cities were razed and hundreds of millions dead. But the world cheered wearily anyway. Thank God, the worst was over. A few even gobbled an unhealthy snack in the presumed safety of their closets.

The face got angry again; many quickly spit out the mouthful of Bin Bin Rice Crackers or hidden Dove Squares they had hoarded. “We now have another task to make your world a better place.”

The planet groaned.

“There is too much greed! The disparity between the haves and have-nots is unsustainable. There will now be an equal distribution of wealth across the planet. All monies will be divided evenly among the populace. You have one month!”

Ninety-percent of the Earth’s residents roared with approval. The rest, the upper-class, wealthy, and super wealthy, wanted nothing more than to smack that smug expression off the alien’s face. They felt worse than when they were told they needed to lose weight.

“Well, wouldn’t you know it,” more than a few billionaires grouched. “The aliens are goddamn communists!”