

A BENIGN INVASION-PART I*

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The Chinese were the first to realize something extraordinary had happened, and the first to react. It began with all of their top secret plutonium enrichment facilities simultaneously shutting down. It did not take long to discern that the reason for this catastrophic failure was that all of the Uranium 235 from which plutonium was derived, along with the stockpile of plutonium reserves, had suddenly simply disappeared. Suspecting a massive conspiracy and likely act of war from a foreign foe, Chinese authorities immediately declared martial law and effectively locked down the entire country of more than 2 billion people. The crisis deepened within hours when it was then confirmed that the whole nuclear arsenal controlled by the Chinese and so laboriously assembled over the past 70 years had also disappeared. The missiles were still intact and secure in their silos, but the weapons had “lost” their nuclear warheads. At this point Chinese authorities scrambled their air force, sent their navy to sea, activated all land forces, and prepared for war with an as yet unknown enemy.

Ironically, the threat of world wide war receded within a day, the same day, September 11, 2041, that all the nuclear nations of the world discovered they had suffered identical losses. Instant war became impossible and seemed pointless without the threat of nuclear weapons and their destructive power. If the politicians were puzzled, the physicists were even more so. The politicians could not account for why this sudden loss of nuclear material had occurred, and the physicists had no notion whatever of how it could have happened or how such a mass of radioactive material could go undetected. The hint of an explanation began the very next day, September 12, when an enormous solar storm lasting 18 hours disrupted all electronic activities on earth. Without effective radio, microwave, and even computer operations, no kind of world war was possible in the 21st century. On the third day of the world wide crisis electronic communications were restored and, again simultaneously, the following message appeared on the screens of every

computer and TV monitor in the world, all electronic billboards, phones, and the like:

**GREETINGS AND PEACE TO ALL EARTHLINGS FROM
YOUR GALATIC NEIGHBORS OF THE THIRD PLANET
FROM THE SECOND STAR OF ALPHA CENTAURI:**

We come in peace and genuinely universal brotherhood. We will do you no harm and promise great mutual benefit from our future relations. It is we who have removed your fissionable materials and, as you suspected, sent them back to their home in the cauldron of your solar system. We have done so that you may not misunderstand our coming to your planet, and in that misunderstanding, perceive us as the kind of threat that human beings, we have long observed, so frequently respond to with violence. In this instance the violence you might have unleashed would have done us no harm, but would surely have released that nearly unimaginable horror that your wisest leaders have feared for more than 90 of your years: the total destruction of human civilization, one that would make the entire planet uninhabitable for thousands of years and destroy countless species and most life on your beautiful green planet for untold generations to come. We could not allow this to happen as it is totally incompatible with who we are, with our intergalactic responsibilities, and with the reason that, after so many generations of simply observing the rise to dominance of your species on Earth, we have now chosen to reveal ourselves to you. We would rather not have revealed ourselves to you at this time. It has long been our hope that we might do so once humanity had reached a level of historical and cultural and intellectual development that would make you more our peers. But we have become increasingly alarmed that this would never happen, not just to your detriment, but to ours as well, so we have chosen to reveal ourselves to you at this time. (And yes, we have been in some measure observed by you in the past, in your "UFO events." But truth be told-and as you will discover, we are capable only of truth telling-exactly on three occasions have we ever in any form been observed, and none of these involved the crash of a "flying saucer.")

The threat we perceive to be so imminent to your very survival

and for which we have now chosen to intervene is not that of nuclear holocaust; it is rather that which comes from what you have called “global warming.” By our calculations, the planet Earth is less than 5 years away from reaching an irreversible and catastrophic tipping point that, once reached, would pose threats to human civilization that would take billions of lives and set you back literally thousands of years. In the days to come, we will be glad to share with your scientists our discoveries, as well as to explain how we were able to “spirit away” fissionable materials, travel to your solar system, and a host of other scientific discoveries that you will find very beneficial. But the most pressing issue, once you have actually met us and been persuaded that we are to be trusted, is to show you how you can not merely stop contributing to global warming, but actually reverse some of the damage that has already been done. This will make possible, we believe, the kind of human flourishing that your greatest philosophers have long urged as the right goal for “humanity.”

But you do need to get to know us, to understand our motivations, and to trust us. We propose to proceed cautiously. Accordingly, we would request that you organize a delegation of not more than 10 persons to meet with us to begin planning how to establish communication and relations between us. We would want this to be a delegation organized through your United Nations, not necessarily of the political leaders of your nations, but representative of diverse political, economic and scientific interests, international, multi-racial, and sexually diverse. And please include one of your poets. We will then work together to create task forces of humans and Centaurians to advance relationships on a variety of fronts, always remembering that the first priority is to ward off the devastation that continued global warming will do to your home, so far, your only home.

This message was received worldwide with a mix of relief, suspicion, bafflement and inevitable fear. It took the UN more than a month to organize a delegation of 10 “Earthlings” to initially meet with the Centaurians. The negotiations among the politicians were especially intense, and little progress was made until every nation had been promised proportional membership on future task forces. But as difficult as it was for politicians to select their five representatives, it was still more difficult for international nongovernmental organizations to select one religious representative, one poet and one philosopher. The major

religions of the world, already flummoxed by the mere existence of Alpha Centaurians, could not agree on one person to represent all of them. In the end, a scholar of world religions from the University of Oxford rather than a religious leader was chosen. Only the scientists settled on their two Nobel Laureates—one in life sciences, one in physics, both with expert knowledge of climate change and its impact on the planet and its living organisms—with relative ease. During this entire period no further communication was received from the Centaurians, nor was any physical sign of their presence in our solar system detected.

Once assembled, the delegation spent more than two additional weeks in seclusion, organizing itself, agreeing on its agenda (all the while not knowing the Centaurians' agenda), selecting spokespersons, and waiting to hear from their intergalactic neighbors how to proceed. Then early one day each of the 10 woke to find him or herself in a different room in an unknown location somewhere on or near earth. Each emerged from his or her room to find a tasty breakfast buffet with each of their national food specialties waiting, and soon after, a first meeting with Centaurians.

The appearance of the Centaurians to the human representatives from Earth was surprising, but not shocking. The Centaurians' physical bodies were sufficiently "human like" to be reassuring, and different enough to provoke wonder. In the first instance, of the 10 Centaurians in the room, none was less than seven feet tall, nor more than eight feet; all had only two legs, two arms, one head, and stood erect. At the end of each arm—which appeared to have three, rather than merely two, major segments, was a recognizable hand, albeit one with seven fingers. Additionally, the bodies of the Centaurians were entirely hairless, and there was nothing in their outward appearance to indicate any kind of sexual difference. Most striking to the Earthlings, however, were the Centaurian heads: they were, by sheer volume, at least twice the size of any human being's head and elongated, and resembling nothing on Earth so much as a horse's head. There was a long snout with a large mouth and comparably large teeth; directly above, two large openings apparently for smelling, and set back from these, large, exceptionally round eyes. While any given Centaurian had a uniform eye color, the variety of colors among them exceeded anything ever observed on earth. Moreover, eye color could and did change with some regularity, and as the humans soon discovered, seemingly as a function of changeable Centaurian mood. Centaurian ears were proportionally large and able to rotate in the same way horses could move their ears.

Without doubt, the most striking and puzzling physical attribute displayed by the Centaurians was speech. They did speak to humans, in a somewhat stilted and formal manner, always in grammatically correct constructions of the first language of the person to whom they were speaking. But they did not appear to speak to one another. Apparently, the Centaurians communicated with one another telepathically.

The first several days of meetings between the Earth Delegation and the Centaurians consisted of introductions and agenda setting. It took some time for all to agree on priorities; the physicist, for instance, was very keen to know how the Centaurians had traversed space, removed fissionable materials from earth, and transported the humans to wherever they were. But soon enough the urgency of the task facing them- preventing a worldwide disaster from global warming- got all to agree on what task forces needed to be created. There were, in sum, more than 100 different “master” groups needing to be formed, addressing everything from the scientific issues to the economic impact of changing how energy was used to how to stimulate the moral imaginations of human beings to accommodate alien beings in their midst, especially one of such clearly superior intelligence and accomplishment. While all of these task forces needed to be international and worldwide, most required that each sovereign nation in the world create its own task forces and coordinate with others. Monumental as the task before them was- and not merely the scientific task, but the political need for vast international cooperation- humanity rose to the challenge, with more than a little assistance from the Centaurians.

In a mere 4 years the Earth’s climate stopped warming, and miraculous as it seemed, in the fifth year there was actually the first recorded drop in worldwide average temperature in more than 80 years. To be sure, it was modest- barely .3 degrees Celsius, but nonetheless significant. Given the conventional wisdom that the full impact of CO2 and methane and other gases largely responsible for global warming took 10 years or more to have their effect, this apparent reversal in only 5 years was stunning. Most of this success was attributable to the new technologies- mostly those for directly capturing solar energy and recapturing carbon emissions- that the Centaurians had taught the peoples of Earth to develop and use.

After 10 years- 10 years post Centaurian “invasion,” a term virtually never used by humans when talking about the Centaurians- the Earth’s climate had sufficiently cooled and stabilized that most of the more developed nations began programs to try to restore some of the species

that had become extinct in their native habitats. In the U.S., for instance, Zoos organized to try to restore emperor penguins to the Antarctic, and polar bears to the arctic, both of which-along with many thousands of other species of plants and animals-had survived for several decades only in zoos and laboratories. President Sasha Obama herself led the effort to secure Congressional funding for such restorative efforts.

One of the more substantial “side effects” of this united worldwide cooperation to combat global warming, under the tutelage of the Centaurians, was worldwide economic transformation. The new technologies had demanded substantial change everywhere in how manufacturing and agriculture, transportation, heating and lighting and much else, were all organized and carried out. The result was a new level of international cooperation and prosperity, the likes of which could not even have been conceived of before the Centaurians arrived. A second consequence was that the United Nations had been greatly enhanced by its leadership, so much so that now for the first time the prospects of a worldwide government capable of assuring continuing peace and greater prospects for justice were being taken very seriously.

Then the other shoe dropped. Politicians in particular, even those who had risen to the heights of being better characterized as statesmen and stateswomen, had long wondered what was in it for these seemingly endlessly altruistic Centaurians. And while the Centaurians had, as far as anyone could discover, kept their word never to lie to humans, they had not always shared with human beings everything they knew. For instance, the Centaurians never restored, nor permitted the restoration, of nuclear weaponry on Earth, nor did they explain how they had made it disappear, nor did they disclose the secrets of interstellar space travel. These withholdings bothered no one who thought about it, most of whom supposed that the first was an additional and highly desirable benefit, the second not all that crucial, and that the third might be forthcoming at that future date when humankind proved themselves ready for it. But the failure of the Centaurians to fully disclose their interest in rescuing humanity from self-destruction was another matter, and one of increasing concern to the world’s leaders. What was in it for the Centaurians?

On the 10th anniversary of the first occasion that a message from the Centaurians had appeared all over the world on TV and computer monitors, electronic billboards and phones, a second such communication was sent out. This one specified what the Centaurians wanted for themselves:

GREETINGS AND PEACE TO ALL EARTHLINGS FROM YOUR GALATIC NEIGHBORS OF THE THIRD PLANET FROM THE SECOND STAR OF ALPHA CENTAURI:

For a decade of Earth years we have cooperated with you to stop and reverse the ravages of global warming upon your fair planet, its living inhabitants, and human civilization. We believe this has been an entirely successful cooperation. We, whom you call “Centaurians,” have also been very impressed with the degree of cooperation human beings have established with one another so that besides successfully combating global warming, you have also transformed your economies in ways that are sustainable for a long time, promise greater fairness in the distribution of benefits, and even suggest that greater political cooperation might follow in the future. Many of us were skeptical that such a relatively (cosmically speaking) primitive species as humans could accomplish so much in so little time.

For our part, we look forward to continuing communication and cooperation between our “peoples.” We believe we have a great deal more to offer humanity in the years to come. For instance, despite the differences in our respective anatomies and physiologies, there is enough fundamental biological similarity that many of the discoveries we have made about how to treat disease and disability (and yes, we do suffer these; we are not gods!), we believe would be useful to you as well. We used to suffer a wide variety of cancers and neurological impairments, but long ago eliminated these scourges from our lives. In time, when the time is right, we would like to share with you the secrets of interstellar travel, which could prove as enriching for you as it has proven to be for us.

But we are not communicating with the peoples of earth now to celebrate our past and future triumphs. We are communicating with you to let you know how you can help us. First, however, you need to know that we would ask you to do nothing that you would not ask of yourselves (indeed, nothing that you have not already long done and continue to do). Secondly, you need to know something more about us than you already know. You have no doubt surmised that we are a very ancient people, by Earthly measures, with very advanced scientific knowledge and cultural achievements. But like you, we suffer death, and like you, we fear its coming and deplore the ways in which death limits our

opportunities for more satisfying experience. In the last several millennia, we have been able to extend our life spans from just under 100 Earth years to an average that now exceeds 200. We also believe, on the basis of sound scientific hypothesis and limited testing, that we can double our life spans again, and quickly, so that Centaurians will enjoy a life span closer to 400 Earth years. That is where you can help us.

We have no desire to shock you, still less to outrage you, but the simple truth is that our only good prospect for substantially increasing our life span is to create a diet rich in human supplied protein. As you have evolved over the course of several million years as a species that benefitted from consuming the flesh of other animals, enabling human beings to grow relatively large brains, so too do we think benefit will come to us with a diet rich in human supplied protein. It is longevity we seek, not larger brains, and our research convinces us that only the very specific nutrients in human flesh- most especially, young human flesh- are capable of supplying this benefit. Please believe us that if there were any other way for us to double our life span and postpone death, we would seek it.

As you have long practiced animal husbandry, so we would like to initiate a program of human husbandry. We believe, however, that we can do this- with your cooperation- in an entirely benign, painless, and we trust morally acceptable manner. We do not propose to seize your young for our consumption, nor do we anticipate establishing factory farms with confinement and restriction imposed. Here is an outline of what we propose for your consideration. More details can be supplied as needed, and as you collectively devise procedures for deciding whether to cooperate with us:

- Between the ages of 18 and 21, each human female would once be expected to donate approximately 40-50 ova. We have the means to stimulate super ovulation and harvest such a donation absolutely without pain or injury to each woman's reproductive capacity.
- Each human male would once be invited, but not required, to donate sperm.
- In the facilities we would create on Earth, making many highly remunerated jobs for human beings, we would fertilize eggs,

divide and clone them, gestate them in artificial wombs, and “birth” newborns at 39 weeks from conception.

- Human infants would be raised in crèches by loving (human) caretakers until ages 3 or 4. At that point, our representatives would select the plumpest, most desirable children for consumption. These children would be painlessly slaughtered, butchered, quick frozen, and shipped to Alpha Centauri.
- Not all children so produced would be for our tables. A good many will become experimental subjects for our scientists, while others will be made available to teach our students human anatomy. Some would be adopted by Centaurian households to perform domestic chores for which they are well suited. Others would become companion animals for our people, and treated with all the love and concern for their well being as you humans lavish upon your pets. Those who become unruly teenagers, however, will be sent to game reserves, where they will be hunted by our sportsmen.

As we promised, we ask of you nothing that you have not yourself long done, if not so much to each other, at least to those animals you judged to be your inferiors. However, unlike human practices, we are not going to impose this plan on you regardless of your desires. We could easily enough do so, given our superior power and abilities, but that is not who we are or wish to become. We are asking your cooperation, and your help, in providing for us a benefit perhaps not as substantial as we have helped secure for you, but still very meaningful for us. Furthermore, should you choose not to help us acquire this benefit, we will simply peacefully withdraw from your solar system, with a promise not to again initiate contact between us. The choice is yours.

As a final- we hope, not ultimately final- word on this request, we wish you to know that at a time which would have been early in human evolution, but quite advanced in our own, we were offered such a choice by the “peoples” of a still more advanced civilization, people who possessed abilities and powers still beyond our grasp. What our ancestors decided we will keep to ourselves. You need to make your choice without being

influenced by ours. We will simply say that what our ancestors chose very much shaped who and what we are today.

Respectfully yours, The Peoples of Alpha Centauri

There was little reason to think the Centaurians were dissembling when they claimed no desire to shock and outrage human beings, but this was precisely the response their communication elicited. In the still less politically stable nations of the world there was extensive rioting in the streets, and in the politically more stable lands, the pundits and preachers were first off the mark shouting their outrage. After a week or so, more temperate and reflective voices were heard, first pointing out that the Centaurians had made a request, not issued an order; that no harm would ensue from not complying- except the harm of lost future benefits- and that very great benefits indeed were promised if the request were granted. Politicians everywhere tried to figure out how to cut the best deal for themselves and their lands by complying with the request while simultaneously discouraging others from doing so and trying to find a way to arrange a separate deal with the Centaurians. But the Centaurians had insisted upon a unified response from humans, and no channels for separate deals could be discovered.

*“A Benign Invasion” is an excerpt from a book in progress, *Valuing Life and Choosing Death: Philosophical Explorations and Practical Guidelines for End of Life Decision Making*. It comes from a chapter on “Valuing Animal Lives.”