

Revelations

By Marty Young

Tom wanted to be alive when aliens made contact but he never expected monsters to do so first.

It was an extraordinary day, last Wednesday. October the 31st—although that made some people think it was all just a joke. But when the monsters were still there the next day, willingly going through medical examinations and meeting with International delegates, it all became a little harder to dismiss.

The first footage aired just after eight that night: a group of more than two hundred mythical beings suddenly standing silently on the banks of the Thames, surrounded by hundreds of white-faced, wide-eyed people.

Only the rustle of nerves had disturbed the first scenes broadcast around the world; the screams had stopped long before the cameras arrived.

The Army had quickly taken control to replace the startled frightened expressions with guns. Lots of `em. And for a moment no one knew what to do. No one spoke or moved.

The world watched through their televisions, listened on the airwaves.

And waited.

Then a robed demon-like beast, all red skin, horns and flickering tail had slowly stepped forth, its massively muscled arms and clawed hands raised high, its demonic face fixed stern. The beast heeded the urgent calls of `Stop!' and remained a few feet in front of the horde—fairies and werewolves, vampires and ghosts barely visible, things bent and twisted, deformed and inhuman, simmering but silent.

The beast's voice had rung out, each word crisp, clear and filled with strength. They were the words humanity had been waiting to hear ever since they had first looked to the stars.

Only they were words expected from aliens, not these things.

“We come in peace.”

“It’s so hard to believe,” Said Gavin, again. He was watching the ongoing events from his lounge room in Sydney, more than ten thousand miles away, sitting in a leather recliner with a beer in hand; he had barely moved from there since it had all begun.

“They’ve been meeting with Presidents and PM’s all day again,” Tom said from a second recliner. “I wish I was there. It just doesn’t feel real watching it from the other side of the world.”

“I bet every man and his dog would be trying to get to London.”

“Do you blame them? I mean, monsters, standing on the bloody banks of the Thames! Can you believe it?” Tom shook his head, as had been his wont for the past two days.

“You’re like a stuck record mate. Do I have to give you a thump to set you goin’ again?”

Tom grinned. His teeth were a little crooked but he was always ready with a broad smile. “But isn’t it amazing?”

“I still don’t think these are the things that hid under your bed and tickled your toes in the dark when you were a kid, Tom. I’d say they’re more likely new species of animals, ones we haven’t discovered before now. Monsters don’t exist.”

But Tom was shaking his head. “You’re wrong--”

“Come on, mate. You’re--”

“D’you know what a ‘monster’ is, Gav?”

Gavin rolled his eyes.

“A monster is a strange and frightening creature, something mythical. Something that shouldn’t exist.”

“Who says they shouldn’t exist? Us? We’re making up the rules as we go. We

might think something shouldn't—or couldn't—exist but that's only because we haven't discovered it yet."

Tom scratched his four day old stubble.

"And obviously now we've 'discovered' these things, we can't call them monsters anymore, can we? They're not mythical. They exist."

"But they shouldn't exist, that's just it. Their chemical, physical, their spiritual make-up defies everything we know as natural."

"Again, only because we're the ones dictating what is and isn't natural.

Tom looked at him with a wry grin. They argued like this at work, too.

He stood up and stretched.

"Science is continually evolving Tom. It has to, you know that. We develop a testable hypothesis to explain new phenomena we don't understand in order to understand it. That's how we grow and develop."

"So you think we have the laws of nature completely wrong, is that what you're saying?"

"Maybe not wrong, but I think we've only got half the pieces of the puzzle. C'mon mate, you call yourself a scientist. It's not such a leap to consider there's a whole huge part of the world we're yet to discover."

"What, a world of fairies and demons?"

"Yep. And werewolves, vampires, ghosts, mermaids, the list goes on."

Tom laughed. "Yeah right."

"Look, so far not one ghost has come forward claiming to be the dead relative or friend of someone living, have they? No one's recognized any of them vampires, either."

"But they've only just made themselves known. Those vampires, they could be hundreds of years old with no living relatives. Who knows what we'll learn over the coming weeks?"

“Those things that looked like demons haven’t said anything about God or Lucifer either. You’d kind of expect them to if either existed. I mean, that’s pretty important news to include in your introduction.”

“They did say they come from a realm of fire.”

“But they never said Hell, did they? I bet you in a year’s time, demon will describe a species of animal, as will mermaid, fairy, and the rest of `em.”

“What about the werewolves? They’re part human aren’t they?”

“Dunno. Maybe, but until we know more, I’d say they’re a branch of Homo Sapien that took a distinctly different evolutionary direction, rather than people like you an’ me that’ve been infected by a curse of some kind.”

For several minutes they watched without speaking as more updates spilled across the screen. It was a constant lately. The past days had been filled with breaking news and gossip, with widespread and further spreading paranoia accompanying the revelations.

Gavin looked at his friend and noticed the excitement still prevalent in his eyes. He rubbed his own heavily stubbled jaw before saying, “You still don’t get it, do you Tom?”

“Get what?”

“I bet you I’m not the only one who sees these things as new species, either equal to or more intelligent than us.”

Tom frowned, and then an eyebrow began to arch as he finally understood what Gavin had said.

“Yeah, now you’re getting it, my friend. Finally. It only took you two days.”

“Oh--”

“Shit? Yeah. Oh shit all right. And there’s something else, too.”

Tom didn’t ask what but that didn’t stop Gavin. It never did.

“They didn’t willingly come in peace, either. I’d bet money on it.”

“You’ve a regular doom merchant today aren’t you?”

“But isn’t it obvious? You’ve been too excited about their existence to think things through. Something important’s forcing their hand. Why else, after all of these centuries, would they’ve revealed themselves to us? They had no choice, mate.”

This was turning into a bad day, Tom thought. Yesterday had been so much better; it had been a day filled with wonder.

“And things have been happening quickly since they showed up, like there’s no time to lose. You fancy another beer?”

Tom returned to his chair and slumped into it. “You’ve made me nervous now. I think I prefer being excited.”

Gavin went through into the kitchen and pulled two draughts from the fridge, then returned to the lounge and handed one to Tom. They both popped the tabs and took noisy sips as they watched further news broadcasts. Most of the footage was from earlier in the day; all of the action now was happening behind closed and heavily armed doors where the cameras were rarely allowed. Yet no matter how many times the images came on, it was still strange seeing the President of the United States standing next to the robed demon that had first stepped forth.

The beast’s name was Xaethion and it was a he, apparently, acting as the spokesman for the monsters. The footage reminded Tom of a scene from one of the X-Men movies, in which mutants and humans finally stood together in friendship. But unlike that scene, there was an obvious anxiety present here.

“Can you imagine,” Gavin said slowly, “What’s so massive that China, Afghanistan, Iran, they all let the US speak on their behalf?”

Tom didn’t want to imagine. He didn’t want to think about anything so frightening.

They drank their beers in silence and continued to listen to the President’s repeated pleas.

“He’s talkin’ about the need for diplomacy,” Gavin interrupted again. He couldn’t

help himself, he never could. "The need for peace and understanding between them and us. But that's only the surface. They need us to trust them before they tell us what's going on. And whatever it is, it's big, something far more than just acceptance."

Behind the President and Xaethion was a group of bizarre beings, things that before Halloween had only appeared in movies and literature.

"It really is like watching a movie, isn't it?" said Tom, wide-eyed despite his recent revelation.

"Yeah, it is. It's hard to believe it's real, seeing it on tele like this. Let's just hope if it gets too intense we can change the channel."

"Or turn it off."

As the camera spanned the leaders of humanity in some of the only footage from inside that secret chamber, the terrified looks were all too obvious. Dark-ringed eyes and deep-set frowns, tight lipped mouths, folded arms-

Gavin took a drink. He shifted in his seat.

"Maybe they've had enough of us," Tom suggested with a shrug. "And what we're doing to the world."

Gavin looked at him.

"Maybe that is it Gav. What if everything we're doing, cutting down trees, polluting the oceans, global warming, that type of thing, what if it's all impacting upon them too? Reducing their habitat and endangering their races to such an extent they've been forced to confront us about it."

"So you're admitting they're not monsters then?"

"I'm serious Gav."

"Well, I hope you're wrong. It's hard enough for us as a race to agree on anything, let alone having to share discussions and decision-making with monsters. And if we've gone so far that these things have to come forth,--"

Gavin was interrupted by news footage of protesters out front of Buckingham Palace. They carried placards covered with words of terror and ignorance. Their faces were those of frightened children scared of going to bed, their voices the same.

“See, and it’s only goin’ to get worse,” said Gavin. “People are going to panic at the idea of these things being real. The fact there’re superior species to us will cause widespread chaos. Things that can pass through walls, swim underwater without needing air, turn into wolves, materialise anywhere they please—nothing will ever be the same.”

“Yeah,” said Tom, feeling more uneasy as the conversation progressed. “I guess it doesn’t matter if they’re monsters or new species when you put it like that.”

“Look at the problems we had accepting blacks and Jews. If it aint white and Christian, it needs shooting, that’s been our thinking.” Gavin finished the rest of his beer and went and got two more without asking. When he returned, he handed one to Tom, who took it without comment, and then he returned to his seat.

Tom stared at the can, listening to the President pleading for the world’s population to accept our new friends, to acknowledge them as colleagues, comrades, to trust what they had to say.

“It’s not going to work,” he mumbled. He finished off his old beer and put the empty can on the ground next to him. Then he opened the new one, even though he didn’t feel like drinking. “How long did it take for us to acknowledge black people as our equal?”

“Too long. There’s no way we’ll accept these things in time to prevent whatever it is they’ve come here to warn us about.”

Gavin was already well into his new can. He tended to drink quickly when he was worried. Tom knew the signs; they’d been friends for more than twenty years.

“D’you think they have the same problems?”

“What’s that?”

“Racism. Sexism. All sorts of -isms. Maybe they’re usually at each others’ throats as well.”

Gavin grunted. “Wouldn’t that be something.”

“Yeah, wouldn’t it.”

More breaking news came on. Things were getting worse. Escalating beyond mere protests. An attack—fortunately rushed and uncoordinated at this stage—had been made on a group of monsters believed to have been given shelter on Downing Street. Molotov Cocktails had been thrown at the gates and armed guards at each end of the Street. They’d done little damage and those responsible had been quickly arrested, but the attacks were undoubtedly a precursor to what was to come.

“And this from a few edgy locals,” said Gavin, looking across at his friend. “I can’t wait for the main event.”

“D’you think it could lead to a world war?”

“A world war or a species war?”

“Which would be worse?”

“You think one’s better?”

“Okay then, which would be less devastating?”

“To whom?”

Tom never answered. He stared at his can again, once more without drinking.

Gavin drank some more. “How d’you think these monsters would fight us—if they had to? I mean, they can turn into animals, appear and disappear at will, shit, they can do things we’ve only ever come up with in stories.”

“We wouldn’t stand a chance,” said Tom. “They’d just pick us off, top down and we wouldn’t know what’s happening. We’d probably blame it on terrorism. That’s part of the reason people are panicking. Now we know they’re real, we have a

right to be terrified of what we know from stories they're capable of doing."

"I wonder why they haven't, then. They could've finished us off long ago."

"Yeah," said Tom, studying the can.

"You going to work tomorrow?" Gavin asked him.

Tom shook his head. Neither of them had been since Wednesday.

"It just doesn't seem important anymore, does it?"

"Jesus Gav, I just feel so helpless," Tom stood and started pacing the lounge.

"The world's turning to crap and I can't do a thing about it!"

The beer can crinkled in his hand. Gavin said nothing.

"I feel like we're on the Titanic."

That at least made Gavin laugh, although it was a short and nervous laugh at best.

"It's like we're bloody bystanders on our own world! I wish there was something we could do instead of just sitting here watching it on TV!"

"Even if we were in London, what could we do?"

It was such a depressing question; Tom's shoulders sagged as if Gavin had hit him. He closed his eyes. He'd never felt so insignificant in his life. What could he do? Hold a protest sign and join the crowd? Raise his voice with the rest and hope someone heard? Would that make him feel better?

"As much as it is, it's not our world, mate."

With a resigned sigh, Tom returned to his chair and slumped into it. He ran a hand through his already messed up hair.

Broadcasts and updates were continuous, interspaced with mythical backgrounds on the creatures that now stood next to the world leaders. The vampires and demons came across looking the most frightening, the fairies the most deceitful. Ghosts more emotional. How true any of that might be was difficult to discern looking at the gaunt worried faces of man and monster within that international

chamber of discussion. Everything looked frightening and everyone frightened. Suddenly Tom sat up straight. He looked at his friend. "I guess they need us."

"Whaddya mean?"

"They need us." He shrugged. "To feed off, I guess, one way or another. That's why they're doing it this way. In peace."

Gavin pressed his lips together and Tom could hear him breathing deeply through his nose. He'd never seen him looking so grim.

He decided not to continue thinking about it anymore.

Every so often, breaking news would come in about new attacks on churches across England, against consulates and embassies. The attacks weren't aimed at other humans but at the monsters themselves, only there were no direct targets; there'd been few sightings of any of the monsters other than those attending the meeting since early Thursday morning now.

"It's getting worse," said Tom, repeating what Gavin had said earlier.

Most of the attacks were in demand that something be done, some form of control to ensure mankind remained the dominant species. Cage the creatures, imprison the monsters! We need new laws to control them, Police to enforce these laws-

Surprisingly, Australian protests had remained subdued. Show us the monsters!, demanded the handful of protesters marching outside the British High Commission in Canberra. You don't own them!, others out front of the US embassy proclaimed. It's our world too, their signs said.

But despite the numbers that were slowly swelling, the protests continued to lack the tension of those in London. There was still too much disbelief; fear had yet to arrive on Australian shores.

But how long until it did, Tom wondered? What would it take for the panic to set in?

And once it had, what then?

Gavin drank more beer and Tom sipped his while they watched yet more footage of escalating attacks. The US embassy in Grosvenor Square had been bombed; the tele showed violent flames tearing through the remains. Sirens and fire trucks and a police-cordoned road added to the scene.

A young man, white, middle-class and with a nine-to-five haircut was interviewed as he'd said he'd heard the explosion. There was undisguised fear in his eyes but it was an emotion turning rapidly into hate.

He said the monsters had done this. It was their fault. They were to blame for all of the violence. Shouts from the background suggested people there agreed with him.

"Mankind wasn't ready for this," Tom whispered.

"And there you were hanging out for aliens."

"We sure wouldn't have been ready for them."

"Nope, no way."

Last weekend Tom had spent Saturday night outside staring at the stars with a glass of Jameson, hoping for his aliens. He'd had his telescope set up, a notepad and pen on his lap, and his camera nearby, all ready for action. It was a regular Saturday night routine.

But the idea of doing anything like that now was plain frightening. Things lived in the dark now; they'd stepped out to show us so. All of those legends, those fictional tales and bedtime stories—

The US President was back on, begging people of the world for peace and compassion, for understanding. Please don't act on age-old fears and bigotry! Please do not succumb to the ways of the past. These beings that have shown themselves do so in the name of peace, for the benefit of all!

It was a repeated scene from earlier in the day, but one more prevalent now.

"He looks so exhausted," said Tom.

"I bet he looks even worse now."

“Yeah.”

“I doubt he’s slept since they arrived.”

“I doubt anyone has.”

A live newsflash suddenly spilled across the screen, interrupting the President.

“Here we go,” said Gavin, leaning forward in his seat. Tom did the same, feeling his stomach lurch.

The talks had broken down, the wired-looking news anchor said, only the division wasn’t between man and monster. As conflicts outside had increased, so too had confrontations within that secret chamber. China had accused the States of fabricating the whole thing, using high-tech effects to create the monsters in order to get what they wanted. It was a ploy, apparently, to regain key strategic control of resources—no doubt petroleum—across the world. Iran had sided with China, as too North Korea, India and France.

“Oh shit,” said Gavin. He scratched his scalp, his fingers rasping against stubble.

“But that’s stupid.”

“It’s just an excuse. It’s not what they really believe.”

The broadcast said several leaders had already left the meeting, ignoring Xaethion’s desperate pleas for trust. A great divide was forming; countries were choosing sides, condemning the actions of others, threatening retribution for deceit or consequences for ignorance.

Tom put his beer down. He folded his arms. “This is getting really bad.”

Gavin emptied the rest of his beer in one go. “You ever heard of the Doomsday Clock?” He asked around a subdued belch.

Tom nodded without taking his eyes from the television screen.

“We’re always so many minutes to midnight,” said Gavin, “With midnight being catastrophic destruction. I think we’re currently set at five minutes to midnight—or we were til now.”

“How far d’you think they’re going to advance it?”

Gavin looked at him. “I wonder if they’re goin’ to have time to advance it.”

The two friends locked eyes; it was a chilling thought.

It was a problem the Doomsday clock had suffered before; Tom remembered his father had told him tales of the Cuban Missile Crisis back in the early sixties. The world had come precariously close to a nuclear war then, probably the closest it had ever come, but the setting of the Doomsday clock hadn’t been fast enough to reflect the turmoil.

“Things are going to move fast,” said Gavin as more news came in. “And not because of the monsters, either.”

China was arming. North Korea had readied its nuclear arsenal. They’d had enough of the lies and deceptions. The States and the UK were doing likewise, claiming defence against an irrational enemy.

“Surely people can’t be so stupid,” Said Tom in despair. “Don’t they know what’s going to happen?”

But reports of further attacks kept coming in. Bomb blasts, rocket hits on suspected monster localities. Civilians were being killed by the hundreds. Death, destruction all around. Fear was rampant, terror extreme. Television people were screaming and shouting, they were swearing and pointing at the camera.

We don’t want them here!, they were saying. They’re not God’s creatures.

Nature’s abominations had no right to live! Kill them before they kill us-

Xaethion suddenly appeared onscreen, his glistening black eyes shining, his brow deeply furrowed. As he spoke, his upper lip curled to expose razor teeth.

Please, he said, please stop what you are doing. Understand that we mean you no harm. We are not here to ask for equality or to take over. We do not want to get involved in human ways.

“It’s pointless,” said Gavin, reading the scrolling headlines down the bottom of the screen that told of further conflicts spreading across the world. The

international meeting was over.

It was nearing midnight. Fast. Too fast for the clock to keep up.

But still Xaethion stared into the camera, looking out from every television screen across the world. Do not take this path, he said and for the first time, it sounded like a threat. Do not, for this way leads only to destruction! It leads quicker towards the end.

We come only in peace, he declared once more and this time, it sounded like Tom's despair. We are here to help, before it is too late to help. But you have to listen, you have to trust us-

"It's funny," said Tom as he watched the demon plea with humanity.

"What could possibly be funny?"

"The word monster. It also means a cruel and inhuman person."

Xaethion's pleas went unheard. Instead, the world could only hear the angry tolling of midnight bells.

"Maybe monsters do exist then," Gavin said quietly as he reached for the remote.

"But I don't think I like this show anymore." He turned off the television and the lounge fell silent...

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