

Occupation Force

Frank Herbert, 1955

Scanned by Anaerobic

He was a long time awakening. There was a pounding somewhere, General Henry A. Llewellyn's eyes snapped open. Someone at his bedroom door. Now he heard the voice. "Sir ... sir ... sir ... " It was his orderly.

"All right, Watkins, I'm awake."

The pounding ceased.

He swung his feet out of the bed, looked at the luminous dial on his alarm clock -- two-twenty-five. What the devil? He slipped on a robe, a tall, ruddy-faced man -- chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Watkins saluted when the general opened the door. "Sir, the President has called an emergency cabinet meeting." The orderly began to talk faster, his words running all together. "There's an alien spaceship big as Lake Erie sailing around the earth and getting ready to attack."

It took a second for the general to interpret the words. He snorted. *Pulp magazine poppycock!* he thought.

"Sir," said Watkins, "there is a staff car downstairs ready to take you to the White House."

"Get me a cup of coffee while I dress," said the general.

Representatives of five foreign nations, every cabinet officer, nine senators, fourteen representatives, the heads of the secret service, FBI and of all the armed services were at the meeting. They gathered in the conference room of the White House bomb shelter -- a paneled room with paintings around the walls in deep frames to simulate windows. General Llewellyn sat across the oak conference table from the President. The buzzing of voices in the room stopped as the President rapped his gavel. An aide stood up, gave them the first briefing.

A University of Chicago astronomer had picked up the ship at about eight P.M. It was coming from the general direction of the belt of Orion. The astronomer had alerted other observatories and someone had thought to notify the government.

The ship had arrowed in at an incredible rate, swung into a one-and-one-half-hour orbit around Earth. It was visible to the unaided eye by that time, another moon. Estimates put its size at nineteen miles long, twelve miles wide, vaguely egg-shaped.

Spectroscopic analysis showed the drive was a hydrogen ion stream with traces of carbon, possibly from the refractor. The invader was transparent to radar, responded to no form of communication.

Majority opinion: a hostile ship on a mission to conquer Earth.

Minority opinion: a *cautious* visitor from space.

Approximately two hours after it took up orbit, the ship put out a five-hundred-foot scout which swooped down on Boston, grappled up a man by the name of William R. Jones from a group of night workers waiting for a bus.

Some of the minority went over to the majority. The President, however, continued to veto all suggestions that they attack. He was supported by the foreign representatives who were in periodic communication with their governments.

"Look at the size of the thing," said the President. "An ant with an ant-size pea-shooter could attack an elephant with the same hopes of success we would have."

"There's always the possibility they're just being prudent," said a State Department aide. "We've no evidence they're dissecting this Jones from Boston, as I believe someone suggested."

"The size precludes peaceful intent," said General Llewellyn. "There's an invasion army in that thing. We should fire off every atomic warhead rocket we can lay hand to, and ... "

The President waved a hand to silence him.

General Llewellyn sat back. His throat hurt from arguing, his hand ached from pounding the table.

At eight A.M., the spaceship detached a thousand-foot scout as it passed over the New Jersey coast. The scout drifted down over Washington, B.C. At eight-eighteen A.M., the scout contacted Washington airport in perfect English, asked for landing instructions. A startled tower operator warned the scout ship off until Army units had cleared the area.

General Llewellyn and a group of expendable assistants were chosen to greet the invaders. They were at the field by eight-fifty-one. The scout, a pale robins-egg blue, settled to a landing strip which cracked beneath it. Small apertures began nicking open and shut on the ship's surface. Long rods protruded, withdrew. After ten minutes of this, a portal opened and a ramp shot out, tipped to the ground. Again silence.

Every weapon the armed services could muster was trained on the invader. A flight of jets swept overhead. Far above them, a lone bomber circled, in its belly THE BOMB. All waited for the general's signal.

Something moved in the shadow above the ramp. Four human figures appeared at the portal. They wore striped trousers, cutaways, glistening black shoes, top hats. Their linen shone. Three carried briefcases, one had a scroll. They moved down the ramp.

General Llewellyn and aides walked out to the foot of the ramp. *They look like more bureaucrats*, thought the general.

The one with the scroll, a dark-haired man with narrow face, spoke first. "I have the honor to be the ambassador from Kroliia, Loo Mogasayvidiantu." His English was faultless. He extended the scroll. "My credentials." General Llewellyn accepted the scroll, said, "I am General Henry A. Llewellyn" -- he hesitated -- "representative of Earth."

The Krolian bowed. "May I present my staff?" He turned. "Ayk Turgotokikalapa, Min Sinobayatagurki and William R. Jones, late of Boston, Earth."

The general recognized the man whose picture was in all of the morning

newspapers. *Here's our first Solar quisling*, he thought.

"I wish to apologize for the delay in our landing," said the Krolian ambassador. "Occasionally quite a long period of time is permitted to elapse between preliminary and secondary phases of a colonial program."

Colonial program! thought the general. He almost gave the signal which would unleash death upon this scene. But the ambassador had more to say.

"The delay in landing was a necessary precaution," said the Krolian. "Over such a long period of time our data sometimes becomes outmoded. We needed time for a sampling, to talk to Mr. Jones, to bring our data up to date." Again he bowed with courtly politeness.

Now General Llewellyn was confused: *Sampling ... data ...* He took a deep breath. Conscious of the weight of history on his shoulders, he said, "We have one question to ask you, Mr. Ambassador. Do you come as friends or conquerors?"

The Krolian's eyes widened. He turned to the Earthman beside him. "It is as I expected, Mr. Jones." His lips thinned. "That Colonial Office! Understaffed! Inefficient! Bumbling ... "

The general frowned. "I don't understand."

"No, of course," said the ambassador. "But if our Colonial Office had kept track ... " He waved a hand. "Look around at your people, sir."

The general looked first at the men behind the ambassador. Obviously human. At a gesture from the Krolian, he turned to the soldiers behind himself, then toward the frightened faces of the civilians behind the airport fences. The general shrugged, turned back to the Krolian. "The people of Earth are waiting for the answer to my question. Do you come as friends or conquerors?"

The ambassador sighed. "The truth is, sir, that the question really has no answer. You must surely notice that we are of the same breed."

The general waited.

"It should be obvious to you," said the Krolian, "that we have already occupied Earth ... about seven thousand years ago."