

The March of Mysticism

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They revealed they had lived on earth waiting for the moment when they were to be summoned up to their leaders for guidance on how to save the human race. It was stunning, absolutely stunning. Their eyes glistened and veins bulged in their necks. Like cartoon characters, arms raised skyward, shouting strange incantations this devil's dozen plus one simultaneously vanished and shook the foundations of reality.

Each disappearance was followed immediately by a blinding flash and a billowing pillar of smoke. Ralph had perfected his technology a little better than he let on to his colleagues. Unfortunately for them all that remained of them was the smoke. They had served their purpose and would tell no tales. To be consistent he added some movie effects his visual fete.

Fifteen minutes later Ralph reappeared to his dazzled crowd. He reported that the council of the wise had sent his companions to fight against great evils in other parts of the galaxy. He alone was returned as the protector of the human race. Thence forth Ralph became known as the protector and a large number of people became his faithful devotees.

Two days later the stee guards were overpowered by droves of average citizens with glazed eyes and pumping glands. A shaken Roon Wilkins nodded his assent as an enraged superior slammed the wall shouting. 'Next time Wilkins, we use real bullets.'

This was not to surprise the protector, nor was it to worry him. They had the guns but he had the people. They were people too and soon would be drifting to him like mice to the piper. In the meantime he need only point his people in the right direction, wind 'em up and watch 'em go.

The Protector had raised eyebrows around the globe. Everywhere in the western hemisphere people left their homes and jobs to join what was now being called the Movement of the Mystics. Although many had accepted the Protector at

face value the movement was not so successful in the east and failed notably in the USSR.

General havoc gripped America. The public was caught up with the mystics. Since a majority of the public service and a third of the military deserted their posts it was all the authorities could do to preserve vital installations.

With bureaucracy, business and industry grinding to a halt the last remaining bastion of western technology was the nation's military establishments. The White House and the Pentagon were losing personnel but were still under the control of people loyal to the president.

Barbarism gauntleted the nation. The mystics attempted to overrun the military. Wave upon wave of pathetic zombies shed the blood of their lives. This really bothered many soldiers. Men who long ago reconciled themselves to the inevitability of nuclear war and the possibilities of dying in combat were being torn apart within. The present dilemma was far worse in their eyes. Everyone was just plain going crazy and they had to kill them for it.

The power holders were even more shaken. The bottom line was that everything but strategic weapons was a lost cause. The mystics still hadn't penetrated that far but the prospect was deadly close. In a single week there had been shootings inside three missile silo control bunkers. These were the stations from

which a missile could be fired. They were manned by

two armed officers who were to initiate firing procedures only on direct orders from the president. They were also charged with keeping an eye on each other and were required to restrain their partner in any way necessary should he display unusual behaviour. In two of the incidents it appeared the survivor was a loyal officer. In the third case both officers were slain by each other. It was too close a call for the President. Sooner or later the crackpots would be given control of some nukes. The chief and all his men realized that the Soviets knew this as well and were on the verge of launching the first strike of Armageddon. The mutual assessment of the White House and the Pentagon was that time had run out.

So it was that an event Ralph Kinski hadn't anticipated took place. The

frazzled leaders of the skeleton of the nation were led by the President in a plea submitted to the USSR to restore world order. Provisions were made to put all strategic weapons in the hands of the Soviets. Ralph was surprised by the President's decisive action and conceded that the game was up. You couldn't control the world unless you had the hardware to blow it up. He vanished a final time without fanfare.

After moving in and securing the United States nuclear arsenal the Soviets mopped up the mystics and anyone else they fancied. No one seemed to know why the Protector had let this happen or where he was. People's main activities became finding food and cober. The Soviets worked thoroughly and quickly. They were ruthless butchers. The streets of America were literally

covered with blood and guts.

Although the remainder of people who had opposed the mystics felt somewhat cheated by events, they were none the less relieved. The soldiers were relieved. Their countrymen were still dying but at least they didn't have to do the killing. The former leaders of government were relieved. There was a relapse of law and order in their somewhat foreign society.

Epilogue:

Whatever else Ralph Kinski may have done he taught people three hard lessons. First, it took only a generation to forget that one fanatic could use our fears to turn us against each other. Second, that hi-tech and computers aren't nearly as scary as nuclear war. And third, that it is within man's ability to become invisible, but who needs to be invisible?

Brownsworth

"I don't know, I'll bet friend Bodfish has his hand in it, just his sort of style, snake around and get me taken off the masthead. Never did forget that prop-Bod business."

"I expect not sir, the Brunswickan never forgot prop-Bod. No I think there must be some simpler explanation."

"I don't know, of course you're right but Bodfish operatives are everywhere you know. Maybe I offended the editor's mom or something didn't mean it if I did."

"What section are you in sir?"

"Arts, Brownsworth, Why?"

"Of course, well maybe Bodfish did exercise some editorial prowess. But I think it much more likely that your "colume" is it sir?"

"Yes."

"Very good sir, well your colume has probably been mislaid. When I was at Oxford, I knew a number of

Arts Editors, capital bunch of fellows too, but as a com-

mon trend they seemed, for reasons I've never known, to be shall we say, disorganiz-

ed. Part of their Creative ability, and should be encouraged, I expect your col-

ume should turn up early next year."

"You know Brownsworth, if we could bottle that perception of yours, we

could make a fortune."
"thank you sir..."

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