

An open field half a mile from Highway 308 near Bearcreek, Montana. Tents surround a wood-paneled van, and the remains of a campfire are still visible.

This is the "headquarters" of an alien doomsday cult run by the Rev. Dr. Morrow. Black vans have descended, and a standoff is in progress.

The aliens are coming. There is no escape. Humanity's only hope is to befriend them. You are in the best position to make this happen. You've studied them for years.

But damn it all, you don't know how to predict where they'll arrive. And god forbid they land in some desolate spot where nobody speaks their language. They will probably shoot on site. These aliens are not very forgiving of species of lesser intelligence.

So your only hope is to ensure that when they get here, there's a welcoming party that speaks their language and understands their culture. And so you've made it your mission to teach the world.

For years, this was very difficult. People looked at you like a nutcase. Particularly your colleagues at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base. Scientists are difficult to impress, and surprisingly closed-minded. But that all changed when you heard about Project Resonance.

The idea of the project was to produce a virus that would allow for the transmission of thoughts from one mind to another. The small thinkers that came up with the project thought of it as a cure for Braiden's Syndrome, and the generals who funded it thought it might be a good non-lethal weapon. But you knew what it really was: the best tool education had ever seen.

Stealing a sample of the virus was trivial. It reproduces like mad, so it wasn't difficult to get yourself infected by "accident." Then you simply went AWOL. You packed up your van and drove for days. Your destination: Bearcreek, Montana. It wouldn't be hard to find a place to squat there, and there would be a few willing people who might listen to you.

In the sticks, crackpot religious leaders are not unusual. So you styled yourself as a Reverend, despite having no formal religious training. You figured you'd begin recruiting from whoever would listen, and then you'd expand out from there. Your teachings would spread literally like a virus.

The plan worked, to some extent. You've got 63 regular pupils, and some of them have begun missionary work in the wider world. But the plan is not working fast enough. The aliens are on their way.

So your plans have changed: you will pinpoint the location of the landing and go there. Nothing will stand in your way. Even if it is in the middle of a war zone. So you've begun accumulating weapons. Now that over 60 people know how to listen to the aliens, you're sure you will be able to get where you need to go.

But the damn government found you. They've come here, to your van. God knows what they want. Whatever it is, your work is too important for bureaucratic meddling.

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Damn government. They're here for the Reverend. You can't let them do that.

You went into the army straight out of high school. Didn't have nowhere else to go. They sent you out to the Gulf and made you fight. You didn't wanna fight, but you didn't have no choice.

You saw things there. Horrible things. You didn't wanna see those things. When you think about those things, everything goes kind of fuzzy and you don't remember so good no more.

Sooner or later they let you out. Washed up back on shore in California. You didn't wanna go to the VA. Too many people there who reminded you of the bad things. So you made a sign and sat on a street corner for awhile. Then you started moving around. Didn't wanna stay in one place for too long.

So you eventually wound up in Montana. There you are one day a few weeks back, when the Reverend comes up to you. You didn't know it was the Reverend then though. Rev tosses you a ten. You say "thanks, bud!" Rev says "cheers," and winks at you, holds out his hand, and you shake it.

A few days later, the Reverend comes back and asks you if you wanna hear a story. You say sure if there's another ten in it. Rev grins and says you drive a hard bargain, and then starts talking at you and using a lot of words you don't understand. But somehow you can picture it in your mind. The aliens. They're coming.

When the Reverend gets done talking, you understand a lot more. You understand that if the aliens come and ain't nobody around to greet them, you're all gonna be dead. And so you agree to help.

You feel that you are growing closer to the Reverend, just like the others who have been with him longer. More and more, you feel what he feels and think what he thinks. Soon, you will be inseparable.

But now the stupid government is here. You don't like government. You like the Reverend.

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You couldn't believe it when you heard it, and even seeing him for yourself, you can scarcely believe it now. But that's Morrow all right.

Dr. Morrow used to be one of your top physicists at Wright-Patterson. Morrow was always a little nutty, and there were always rumors about staying late at night attempting to contact aliens, but that's physicists for you, right?

That's what you thought, anyway, until Morrow disappeared. The joke around the base was that the aliens had finally come, but you privately suspected that the pressure of military research had just gotten too much for Morrow. Either way, you had to mount a full-scale investigation. Dr. Morrow knew too much that was classified, and that was a danger.

You kicked it up to the Pentagon, who took the absence very seriously. Even with several investigators on the case, though, it took them months to find Morrow. Turns out they'd been barking up the wrong tree, because they hadn't really been thinking along the lines of leading a doomsday cult in Montana and living out of a van in a field.

So here you are, to meet with your former employee and try to be the voice of reason. But truly, you don't have much hope. Morrow was always a loose cannon, and now has nothing to lose.

If you can't talk sense into Dr. Morrow, then the military people with you will have no choice but to take the "Reverend" into custody. You can't vouch for what will happen after that.

DR. CRUZ

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It's not easy being director of the CDC under the best of circumstances, much less when your own government hides important information from you. Had you heard about the Resonance virus sooner, you might have been able to stop it from being released into the wild. But no, it was "top secret" - so of course the director of the CDC can't be cleared to hear about the most destructive disease ever to exist!

Well, you've heard about it now. The military brass even offered you samples of the virus from their labs, but they're not immunologists. They didn't realize that this virus mutates quickly once it spreads. Now your only hope is to collect samples from as many strains as possible in order to develop an antiviral agent.

Joining you is a researcher from CDC Spokane, Dr. Rory Purcell. The two of you must collect biological samples from Reverend Morrow and all his followers. It's probably not safe to approach them directly; they are rumored to be heavily armed. The military and police here should see that the area is safe first. Hopefully Purcell won't become a pain; you've heard rumors and have read the disciplinary file.

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The FOOLS, the BLIND FOOLS! You KNEW someday they would experiment with mind viruses, the day just HAD to come, it was INEVITABLE. But perhaps it is not TOO LATE to turn back the tide. There is a hope - a VERY SLIM hope. If only you can GET to the SAMPLES in time.

When you heard about the OUTBREAK in Bearcreek, you didn't wait for ORDERS. You jumped in your car and got on the INTERSTATE and just FLOORED IT. Your car is very fast, you modified it YOURSELF, it can even evade STATE TROOPERS. And they don't enforce the SPEED LIMIT in Montana anyway. Once you were on the highway, you TEXTED your boss in Spokane to let him KNOW. He said they were going to send someone from FORT COLLINS and you should come home. You can't TRUST those guys and you KNEW it, so you texted back "NEGATIVE."

Now you are HERE, and there's people TALKING, and people waving GUNS around. That is IRRELEVANT. It is ORTHOGONAL to your MISSION, which is to OBTAIN SAMPLES FROM ALL INFECTED PARTIES. The DIRECTOR of the CDC, Dr. Cruz, is also HERE. That too is ORTHOGONAL. The MISSION is PARAMOUNT to the SAFETY of the HUMAN RACE.

Doomsday Cult Standoff (B)

MAYOR BRANDEN

Act 2 Scene 2
Politician

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Bearcreek is a tiny town, a tight-knit community of families. You've been the mayor for most of your life, because you're the only person in town with the slightest interest in the position. But you love your town, and you consider yourself its steward.

You knew this Morrow was trouble the moment that wood-paneled van drove into town. When residents started flocking to the field, like rats to the pied piper, you began to get frightened. You would have loved to kick the "Reverend" out immediately. But things are never easy when you have to go through channels.

It turns out that this field is private property, but whose property it is exactly is unclear. There was an inheritance mess back in the 1950s and the land ended up under dispute, with three separate families and a fuel oil company claiming rights. The company is the de facto owner, because they use the field to store tanks of oil, but the families have never given up their claim and as a result, it's hard to know who can actually press charges.

So when you heard the cavalry was coming in, it was music to your ears. Anything that gets rid of this loony is good by you.

DR. FERRIS

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You were the principal of Red Lodge High School, until two weeks ago. A few of your teachers had mentioned this Reverend Morrow over in Bearcreek and had started going there for services on Sundays. Some of the parents in Red Lodge had started asking questions about just who this Morrow was and why weren't our teachers coming to Red Lodge Community Church anymore.

So you decided to head on over there and check it out. When Morrow began, you were a little freaked out at first. This was like no sermon you'd heard before: more like a conspiracy theory about aliens. But then you felt this thrill come over you. You had never heard such a compelling speaker before. There was just something... magical in the air.

By the end of the sermon, you knew what your teachers saw in Bearcreek. And you were sore afraid: the aliens are coming. And the only way to save humanity is to be there when they arrive.

You quit your job at the school. Your family was shocked at first, but after they'd heard the good word from the Reverend they heeded the call as well. You all moved out here to the field so as to be closer to Morrow.

You and your family are growing closer to the Reverend, just like the others who have been with him longer. More and more, you feel what he feels, think what he thinks, and know everything he knows. Soon, you will be inseparable.

But the government has arrived to take the Reverend away. You had worried this day might come. You've got to fight with everything you've got. Surely these people can be made to see reason.

SPECIAL AGENT EPPING

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You never wanted to be the "cults person." But that's what they call you now around the FBI. It stands to reason: you've now been involved in five successful cult takedowns. But it means you get pigeonholed. Oh well, you are used to being around crazies.

But this one is different. Apparently, the leader of this cult, a self-styled Reverend named Morrow, stole a psychoactive virus from Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, where he worked, and is using it to mind-control his followers. At least, that's what you were able to understand out of the highly technical briefing documents.

Your strategy has always been infiltration. You don't like to rush in like the cavalry; it leads to needless bloodshed, which tends to attract negative press. But in this instance you have little choice. You cannot risk infection.

To doubly complicate matters, the FBI is not the only agency here. Members of the CDC, former colleagues from Wright-Patterson, local government officials, and military people are here as well. It's not going to be easy sorting out this mess.

All you want is a quick, surgical takedown. But it looks like even that may be difficult: this group is well-armed. That isn't unusual for cults, but usually, their lack of experience and training makes up for their firepower. Here, you're not sure. Mind-control viruses could certainly change that equation.

LIEUTENANT DANBRIDGE

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Finally, some action! After months of sitting on your ass on a base in DC, a mission in the field.

You received the call at 0400 hours this morning and were immediately flown to Montana, where some kind of wacko nutjob Reverend is getting people all riled up about aliens and stockpiling weapons like it's Armageddon. In addition, he may have unleashed some sort of biological weapon.

This mission is highly classified due to the nature of the bioterror agents involved, and you have a very small group: five ground troopers. They are in the helicopter two miles away, awaiting instructions, and can be with you within 90 seconds. There are several government bureaucrats around and an FBI agent, who might be of some assistance.

Your top priority is to secure the area and be sure the bioterror agent does not spread. Your second priority is to minimize civilian casualties. Everyone here except for you is a civilian.

Good luck, Lieutenant.