

(From CRANK, Fall 1995)

TELL THEM THEY ARE ALL FULL OF SHIT AND THEY SHOULD FUCK OFF

by Terry Bisson

"Mr. President, you might want to take this. It's that NASA fellow you met last month at the Kennedy Center reception."

"Good. What's his name, Palaver? Put him through. Hello? This is the President speaking."

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"What? Hello?"

"This is Dr. Salavard, Mr. President. From NASA; the SETI project? Remember, we met at the Kennedy Center affair, and you gave me this number, and you said I was to call you directly, first thing, when we got some results, and not to wait until the entire scientific community had been ..."

"Yes, yes, I remember, Dr. Salavard. So what do you have for me?"

"We have a signal, sir. What we call a specific. Nothing absolutely positive yet, but--"

"Do you mean an extraterrestrial communication of some sort?"

"It would seem that way, sir."

"Seem? Can you tell me something definite?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"What makes you so sure it's from an intelligent source?"

"The pattern, Mr. President. The signal we are receiving is not a cycling repetition but a series of super low frequency wave spikes in a numerical pattern known as an ascending logarithm. An almost certain sign of intelligence and intentionality. We're pretty sure it's a communication."

"Sure enough to describe it to my Cabinet tomorrow morning, plus a few select guests from the Hill?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"You can do it by satellite phone-link. We're having a pre-breakfast meeting here at the White House. My staff will ring you in at eight a.m. sharp. I hope I don't need to tell you not to breathe a word of this to anybody."

* * *

"Gentlemen, ladies, we have a surprise guest on the line by satellite--Dr. Bruno Salavard, who is in charge of NASA's new SETI project. You wouldn't be sitting here if you didn't know what SETI was all about, or the importance attached to this endeavor. Dr. Salavard, go ahead and tell them what you told me."

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Now, we have time for a few questions. You can ask Dr. Salavard directly, since we're hooked up to a speaker phone. Senator?"

"Dr. Salavard, what makes you so certain this is a signal from an extraterrestrial intelligence? Couldn't it

be a pulsar or even a reflected radio beep from one of our satellites?"

"Senator, we have corrected for all that. The signal comes to us from the system Gorodel 3433B, toward the center of this galaxy. Almost a near neighbor, you might say."

"Admiral, did you have a question?"

"Yes, Mr. President. Any idea what this near neighbor is trying to tell us, Professor?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"I have a question. This is Congresswoman Elaine Longwood from Chicago. What's the procedure for converting this logarithmic math sequence into words? How long before we get a message in language we can understand?"

"That's our first priority, Congresswoman. Even as we speak, the signal is being run through NASA's 986-based syntax extrapolator. If we come up with a computable formula, or what we call a friendly stack, then--"

"Speaking of friendly, do we think they are friendly?"

"Are we sharing this information with the other NAFTA nations?"

"Any chance they might be human like us?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Thank you, Dr. Salavard. I'm going to have to cut off questions here, ladies and gentlemen, so Dr. Salavard can get back to work. You will be kept posted on further developments through my staff here at the White House. Dr. Salavard, thank you for joining us. I hope I don't need to tell you, I look forward to hearing from you soon."

* * *

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Dr. Salavard, is that you? I have the President on the line. Can you hold?"

"Of course!"

"Hello, Doctor Salavard. The President here. Any progress? Are we any closer to actually deciphering the alien message, if it is in fact a message for us?"

"No question but that it's aimed at us, Mr. President. It's what we call double-specific--extremely localized, and the signal is getting stronger; as a matter of fact, the signal's intensity and frequency have increased by a factor of four since your White House meeting two days ago."

"Nothing your psychic exterminator can't handle, I hope."

"Syntax extrapolator, Mr. President. It works on the principle that--"

"I was making a joke, Dr. Salavard. But that's not why I called. I called to tell you that I'm speaking to the Security Council this afternoon, in closed session. As a matter of fact, I'm putting my hat on right now. I'm on my way to the UN."

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"This news is going to leak our sooner or later, Professor, and I don't want it to look like we are trying to hog this whole deal.

"Yes, sir. I only wish we had something more, well, definite."

"You will, and I expect you to call me as soon as your people come up with it. Night or day. I have you routed directly into the Oval Office; all you have to do is ask for me."

"Yes, sir, Mr. President."

* * *

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Salavard, is that you? This is the President."

"How'd it go, sir?"

"The UN meeting? Pretty good. Great, in fact. I've got them all sitting on the edge of their chairs. But how soon can we give them something? I need a word, a phrase, even if it's just 'Hello, how are you.'"

"How soon? I don't know, Mr. President. It could be within hours, days at the most. The syntax extrapolator is showing 89 percent completion, and it's cooking right along. If we don't lose the signal before it finishes..."

"Lose the signal? Why should we lose the signal? Is there something you're not telling me?"

"No, sir. It's just that we've got the syntax extrapolator programmed in what we call a backspin mode, which means that it can only analyze a completed message. As long as the signal doesn't fade before it finishes, we're okay."

"I'm counting on you to see that it doesn't, Salavard. Meanwhile, I think we better go public with this thing right now, before the tabloids beat us to it. I want to take it to the people. Tonight."

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"I'm the President, Salavard, I can't go on talk shows. That's what we have Vice Presidents for. But he hasn't been briefed on SETI. That's why I'm counting on you."

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Letterman is bigger than Leno, Salavard. Just don't let him bully you. Make sure you get your point across."

* * *

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Welcome to the show, Dr. Salavard. Let me get this straight. This is your job, to talk to spacemen? Your day job?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"And you get paid for this? I mean, like a salary? It's our tax money, folks. Shouldn't we know what they

do with it?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Are these guys calling collect? Can we get one of these spacemen on the show?"

"Our syntax extrapolation program is based on the completion of the rising frequency curve. Dave. Until the algorithm is completed, we won't have anything. But we expect it to terminate within hours and then we will have the first message from an alien intelligence."

"Dr. Salavard, have you checked your answering machine? Maybe something came in while you were in the Green Room."

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"There weren't any little green men in the Green Room were there? I hope they're not coming here hoping to collect welfare."

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Thank you for being on the show, Dr. Salavard. Taking off from what I am sure is a busy schedule on the phone with the President, and so forth. Don't touch that dial, folks! We'll be back with Lyle Lovett and his new bride, Demi Moore, right after a word from our sponsors."

* * *

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Salavard, is that you? This is the President speaking. I caught you on Letterman last night."

"Sorry I was so nervous, Mr. President."

"You were fine."

"I didn't sound repetitive to you?"

"Look, you didn't let him bully you and you got your point across. That's the bottom line. Why so gloomy?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"Is there something you're not telling me?"

"The signal, sir. It started what we call its descending logarithm last night, while I was in New York. By the time I got back here to Huntsville, it had already started to fade."

"Fade? What do we have so far?"

"Ninety-six percent, Mr. President."

"So!"

"I know that sounds like a lot, sir, but remember I told you that our syntax extrapolation program is based on the completion of the algorithmic curve. If the sequence is truncated without completion, we get zip."

"Zip?"

"It's like a sentence where the last word is the one that explains everything. Noun, verb, everything. We're still getting a signal but ..."

"That settles it! I'm going to go on the air and address the nation tonight, while we have a fish on the line, so to speak."

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"I'm going to tell them that it doesn't matter what the message is; the exciting news is that there is a message. We are not alone. There is somebody out there. Somebody who wants to get in touch with us. And Salavard?"

"Yes, Mr. President?"

"Don't let them hang up. I'm counting on you!"

* * *

"Mr. President, I think you'll want to take this. It's ..."

"Salavard, is that you? What did you think of my Fireside Chat? Do you have any more news for me?"

"Yes, sir. Bad news, Mr. President. The worst."

"Shit. I knew it!"

"We lost our signal before the extrapolation was completed. All we're looking at here is some math, which could say nothing or anything. I'm sorry, Mr. President. I should have --"

"Should have what?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"What? Hello?"

"I said, I don't know, sir. There's no way to make the program run any faster. If we had another shot we could articulate a compression sequence, and run it through a simultaneity compiler, which might give us a head start, but..."

"Then don't apologize, Salavard. You did your best. At least we have affirmed that the SETI program is not a waste of time. Right? I mean, hell, now we know there's somebody out there. Right?"

"Tell them they are all full of shit and they should fuck off."

"So why don't I get a good feeling about this, Salavard? Could we have missed something?"

"Missed something, sir?"

"Could they have been telling us something we weren't ready for? Something we just didn't want to hear?"

"I don't see how that could be, Mr. President."

"Well, maybe they'll call back. You'll have your program ready to go. Why wouldn't they call back?"

"I don't see any reason why not, Mr. President."

"What? Hello?"

"I said, I don't see why not, Mr. President."

the end

Back to [TERRY BISSON STORY SHOWCASE Main Page](#)