

Another Way

Beyond the Status Quo, *A Manifesto*

by William Arthur Holmes

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Semmy Speaks

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It was in Las Cruces that things got weird. Dobromir "Dobie" Pokorny was well into his anti-corporate "speaking truth to power" tour in support of his latest book – his manifesto – *Another Way: Beyond the Status Quo*.

After heading north through Kentucky and Indiana, he took an unplanned detour and headed southwest. He soon wished he kept heading north, but eventually made it to New Mexico, with stops in Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas along the way.

He was feeling pretty good about things by that point, despite a rough start, doing exactly what he wanted: staying sober and saying what needed to be said. Selling more books online, in stores, and in person, he felt he was winning the war against those who would shut him up. He spouted off for a living now, and there were plenty of people who did not like what he had to say.

Despite this, word was spreading. Crowds were growing with each passing week. He was filling up those previ-

ously half-empty hotel conference rooms, even the occasional small concert venue, as he shared his plans to save the world.

He was no savior and refused to pretend otherwise. He was a reluctant hero, and said so, repeatedly, after more than one person suggested he take himself more seriously, be more respectable, act like a proper leader. This always came after one of his more humorous presentations, and always from a woman, for some reason.

He knew he had no business giving lectures and solving the world's problems, but the world had gone crazy and nobody seemed to be doing anything about it. Nobody he trusted to get it right, anyway. *Someone* had to inject some no-longer-common sense and decency into the conversation. Why not him?

"The fatal flaw of most would-be saviors," he said, "is to take themselves *way* too seriously. Take your principles, perceptions, intuition and beliefs seriously, sure. Not yourself. This isn't about me, it's about getting people to think for themselves and stop being such followers. I'm the leader who doesn't want any followers. We all need to be responsible individuals!"

He hated corporations, of course. Doesn't everyone? Especially marketing companies hell-bent on convincing people to buy things they don't need. Before getting fired from his last corporate job and starting this tour, he put copies of his *magnum opus* in strategic locations around the office. He hoped his co-workers would read it, like it, tell their friends, and everyone would buy a copy. He likened his approach to Johnny Appleseed. It was as close to corporate marketing as he would allow himself. The process had to be organic.

The book laid out who and/or what was running things on this planet. He tried to focus on the *who* over the *what*, but there were times he had to wonder if there was not *something* out there, unseen, manipulating things.

There was nothing much new in the book for anyone well-versed in the prevailing conspiracy theories – international banker scams, staged terror attacks, CIA/military drug-running and mind-control, etc. – but *Another Way* had solutions. From better toilet seat design to new forms of government and everything in between – assuming there *was* an in-between – he had some real answers.

"Best of all," he was proud to say, "none of my solutions require anyone's assassination!"

In Las Cruces, he and his latest girlfriend, Kaylie – a dark-haired, blue-eyed beauty – had shared a dream about a little blue alien. Neither of them was into aliens or science fiction – or drugs – so it was a bit of a mystery where it came from.

"How is it even possible," he asked afterward as they lay in bed, "for two people to have the same dream at the same time... unless it wasn't a dream?"

In this dream/hallucination/episode, they were joined by a smiling, big-eared, blue-eyed little alien humanoid with blue skin and matching hair sitting in a wide, beige, over-stuffed wing-back chair directly in front of them. And his audience, Dobie and Kaylie, were in theater seats with the alien up on stage.

Its smiling face was that of an effeminate male or masculine female. Delicate and unassuming, but those big blue eyes saw right through whoever they focused on.

With its bare feet planted firmly on the ground, it sat like a king or queen on its throne wearing a simple beige

robe that blended in with the seat. Its legs were also bare from the knees down, giving it a disembodied look, with its head hovering above detached legs and feet.

Its voice, like a man and woman talking at the same time, spoke English in a Hindi-British accent in the royal we. There was a laughing melody to it, Dobie thought. Harmony. He loved to sing, personally – in the shower and around the house, mostly, but also at karaoke bars – but could never harmonize, which he assumed was a character flaw. Because of that, he found this alien's voice especially pleasing.

Kindness was another word that came to mind. He wasn't sure if it was the kindness in the voice that gave it a feminine quality, or its femininity implied a certain kindness. Either way, it was soothing. He could listen to it all day long.

"Our name is Sematalanthoyop, but you can call us 'Semmy.' We are from beyond the Pleiades, in the eighth dimension... when we're not slumming it down here in the third and fourth dimensions. Most of you spend most of your time in the third dimension, influenced more than you know by the fourth, only occasionally reaching the fifth. Point being, we are exponentially better than you! Just kidding. Don't let the term 'higher dimension' fool you. For one thing, it's more of an outer dimension. Almost everything is spherical.

And, to assume that higher-dimensionals are better than you is like assuming someone who can swim while you cannot is better just because you were never taught, or someone who was told the answer is smarter than those not told. Never confuse better-informed or -trained with just plain better. No human is innately better than any other, it's just that some of you have gone off the rails worse than others.

"Do not be frightened. We're the good guys!"

Semmy was happy with how things were working out. Kaylie and Dobie had stopped in Las Cruces, as planned. Getting them back together was not his *main* purpose for visiting Earth, but it was a plus. He had been following these two crazy kids – off and on, planet to planet, from one incarnation to the next – for eons now.

"Who doesn't love a good 'separated, seeking, reunited' story?"

He wished he could have been more helpful in Missouri – other than messing with billboards and people's work schedules – but had to let things play out, as difficult as it was.

"It's not all fun and games. We've got work to do. We just hope it all works out in the end.

~

Awake now but still in bed, Dobie was leaning on one elbow, looking at Kaylie, wondering how he ever got so lucky. Referring to her as his latest girlfriend was a defense mechanism to keep things in perspective. It was a constant struggle for him to *not* get too carried away and take things too far. *Like this whole book and tour thing!* he thought.

As to Kaylie, it was too late. He was in love. His average height, passable physique, sandy brown hair, friendly brown eyes, wit and charm gave him a chance with most women, but he knew better than to expect to date beauty queens like Kaylie. And yet, here they were, sharing this adventure.

Still shaken after their ordeal in Missouri a few weeks prior, she looked up at him warmly, not wanting to lift her head off the pillow. She simply smiled and said, "I don't know, Dobe."

~

Major Randall Watson, Air Force Special Ops, retired, was sitting in a hard, plastic chair in a small, cramped room within a secret military location nearby. A more cynical person might think it was a little too convenient Dobie just happened to pass through Las Cruces within striking distance of this base, but Watson didn't give it a second thought. *He wasn't the conspiracy theorist, Pokorny was.*

The two airmen – one of them female – sat next to Watson in much more comfortable chairs, but they all wore military-grade virtual reality helmets plugged into the same broadcast that Dobie and Kaylie were seeing. These "space nerds" as they called themselves were well-trained in projecting dreams and images into people's heads, but swore this Semmy Speaks broadcast was real. Nobody

knew where it came from or how they captured it – other than entirely by accident – but they had it and everyone who watched was blown away. Even their aliens-in-residence were unfamiliar with this blue race from beyond the Pleiades.

Major Watson assumed the nerds were lying. Half of everything labeled top secret was a lie, designed to throw people off the scent of the other half that was legitimate. "Either way," Watson said, "I'm gonna have some fun with this!"

Nothing else he had tried had worked on Dobie. Hiring people to rough him up, put dents in his car and chase him out of parking lots only made Pokorny that much more determined. The two men were alike in that respect, but Watson had no clue how to shut Dobie down.

Earlier that year

Air Force Colonel Reginald P. Charonne, retired, now CEO of SaynCorp, was almost never physically at the office. He much preferred the cooler climes of northern Michigan over the oppressive heat of The South and took his meetings from afar, online. Pressing issues, however – one of which was a power struggle between two senior executives, a favorite spectator sport of his – required his presence.

"Sometimes you have to actually be there," he said, "and kick some ass!"

There was also the matter of the surveillance tapes. The entire office was bugged, and he regularly had the transcripts emailed to him. When he read in the transcripts that someone in the break room had referred to him as a Neanderthal, he smiled to himself and requested

the audio and video tapes. Someone was about to get fired, another hobby of his.

Video surveillance was provided by the building and its management company, so Charonne never bothered to install his own. When told that the footage for the time frame in question had been recorded-over before he could see it, however, he became furious and scheduled another security company to augment the existing system with his own.

When he first arrived at the office that morning, as he passed through the break room, he noticed Dobie's book on the counter. The word manifesto – in red – jumped out at him as he passed, and he picked it up. Reading it between meetings – he was a speed reader – he had it finished before the end of day. He had to admit – but, only to himself – that Dobie had some good ideas, but nothing very practical or even possible in the real world. Still, he thought people might be dumb enough to fall for it.

He was already in the mood for kicking somebody's ass, so he decided to add this manifesto to his list of things to deal with, and nip it in the bud. At her desk in the ante-room in front of his office sat his secretary, Crissie. A very attractive young woman with hazel eyes and dirty-blond hair, he didn't bother to say hello. It was not necessary. She had come down from Michigan with him on his private plane.

“Go ahead and call Norwich into my office,” he said casually as he thumbed through the letters, bills and adverts from the previous day's mail, “as discussed. Tell him it's urgent, of course. This should be fun!”

It was not urgent. It was almost never urgent, but standard procedure was to pretend otherwise. Also standard

was to have Norwich wait exactly seven minutes in the anteroom before being called into Charonne's actual office. He had done his own studies – he considered himself a bit of a sociologist – and found this to be the perfect length of time for putting underlings properly on edge.

Charonne timed it so that Dobie's book was still in the air just before hitting the trashcan when HR Director Kenneth Norwich entered. Dobie would have been happy to know his book was flying across at least one corporate executive's office, but Norwich was terrified. He was relatively new and had only met the Colonel a few times in person. It was scary every time.

Charonne also thought of himself – he was almost constantly thinking of himself – as a modern day Clark Gable. There was a very, *very* slight resemblance. More importantly, he was a brilliant businessman, charming when necessary, and so driven that even his friends found him difficult to deal with. People tended to just say "yes, sir," and get out of his way.

"What's the point," he now asked Norwich in his deep, resonant, yet still somehow nasal voice, "in discussing impossible theories?"

Norwich's fear had escalated to full-on terror by the time he came through the big boss's door. He looked for something to hold onto, something to lean on as he entered, and nearly crapped his pants when he turned to his left and came face-to-face with a black bear staring at him, glassy-eyed and baring its fangs. He instinctively raised his arms to protect himself before realizing the poor beast was long-dead, stuffed, and preserved for all eternity to entertain people like the Colonel.

Charonne laughed so hard, he almost fell over getting out of his chair. "Oh, my God, that was funny! Thank you! Best laugh I've had all week!"

"You needed me, sir?" Norwich eventually managed.

"This is a 'right to work' state," Charonne returned to the point at hand as he regained his composure, buttoned his jacket, and came around the desk to shake Norwich's hand.

"Yes, sir." Norwich felt like a schoolboy unprepared for a pop quiz.

Vigorously, almost violently shaking his junior executive's hand, Charonne said, "We can fire people without cause."

"Ah, well...." Norwich began to argue as the two were now face to face. Actually, Norwich's eyes were level with the knot of Charonne's necktie. He had to look up at an uncomfortable to meet his boss's intimidating gaze.

At Norwich's words, Charonne merely raised an eyebrow, and that was all it took for the director to stop himself and melt into the plush leather seat in front of the desk.

Halfway through any sentence, the Colonel could usually determine where the speaker's argument was going. Norwich was obviously about to argue against firing employees without cause, so Charonne saw no point letting him continue.

The Colonel turned and sat along the front edge of his desk. His left leg was planted on the floor, revealing his red-on-black argyle socks.

"Yes, sir," Norwich said in a much more subservient tone now that Charonne's crotch was directly in front of him. Like a motorist passing a horrible accident on the highway, he couldn't help but look.

"Have it your way," Charonne winked and smiled, knowing his crotch was on full display. He liked to show it off every chance he got, he was so proud. "To be safe, then," he stood and returned to his desk chair, "we'll wait for this Portnoy complainer to give us an excuse, no matter how flimsy. *Then* we fire his ass! Got it?"

"Yes, sir." Norwich was relieved for two reasons: Charonne's crotch was no longer in his face; and, someone other than himself was being fired. Up until that moment, he had no idea who they were talking about.

He knew Portnoy was not Dobie's last name but did not dare correct the Colonel. It would be just like the man to purposely mispronounce it so Norwich would correct him. The Colonel would then verbally attack and belittle him, which everyone knew was one of Charonne's favorite hobbies.

Never much of a reader – other than blog posts and corporate literature – Norwich had no clue the name Portnoy was in reference to a popular novel from the same year as the Woodstock festival.

The Colonel assumed firing Dobie would break his spirit and send him on a downward spiral of job applications and failed interviews. He remembered how disheartening it was that one time he had to interview for a job, only to be rejected, all those years ago. Charonnes don't *get* rejected, and his daddy pulled some strings to get him into officer training school.

His subsequent military success was all his – rising to the impressive rank of Colonel – but he was then simply handed the reins of SaynCorp, the family business. He would argue strenuously with anyone accusing him of benefiting from nepotism, being "born on third base thinking he'd hit a triple," but they were right and he knew it. Was it

his fault he took advantage of life's gifts? Anyone else would have done the same. His accusers, he decided, were simply jealous of his good fortune, good looks and overall brilliance.

He smiled at the thought of Dobie flipping burgers or digging ditches for a living, and had hoped pulling his corporate job security out from under him would end Pokorny's lofty aspirations and obvious messiah complex. He thought for sure Dobie would succumb like millions before him and beg for the next soul-sucking corporate job just to pay the bills. He expected Dobie to fall in line and take his rightful place as a mere cog in the wheel of modern, now digitally-dependent, industrial/corporate society.

"I don't want," Charonne barked, "this *Communist Manifesto* 2.0 giving my people any ideas!"

"Of course, sir." Karl Marx's work was also written before Norwich's time, but he had at least heard of that one.

"If I had a fireplace," Charonne was still barking, "it would be burning right now. I need a fireplace, Kenny! Have one installed after I leave."

"Yes, sir. Wood-burning? Gas? Electric? Digital?"

"Digital?! How can I burn books with a digital fireplace?" Shaking his head, he added, "I'd love a wood-burning hearth, but that's probably against city codes. Just get me something that passes codes and burns books."

"Yes, of course. Anything else, sir?"

"I don't even want that book in my trash. Dig it out and take it with you."

"Yes, sir."

As Norwich bent over to extract the book, he could feel Charonne checking him out from behind. He smiled and wondered what might happen next. He never knew the Colonel was so inclined, but did know climbing the corpo-

rate ladder went much faster for those willing to climb the boss on their way up.

In the trash, Norwich found a half-eaten container of sliced peaches sticking to the book. Watching its syrup drip slowly down the sides, it reminded him of something else sticky, and he became aroused. He looked for a towel or tissue to wipe off the book.

Charonne was no help. He simply smirked and adjusted himself.

Norwich took a knee and used the edge of the trash can to scrape the syrup off as he pulled the book out. He minced, almost tip-toed, toward the door as he carried the soiled book like a dead rat out of the office.

"One more thing," Charonne asked in a conspiratorial tone. Norwich stopped and turned, hoping he was about to be asked out on a date. "Have you heard anyone talking about Neanderthals?"

Norwich thought that was a strange question. "Um, no, sir."

"Alright, then," Charonne nodded and gave a sarcastic wave goodbye.

Major Watson was the Colonel's ground force in this little war that had popped up "like a delightful summer shower," as Charonne put it. He loved a good war and ordered his junior officer to make sure Dobie didn't turn into "some sort of charismatic leader like Fidel Castro or Mahatma Gandhi. At the very least, get this dimwit, Dobie – Pokorny, is it? – talking about something other than capitalism and conspiracy theories!"

Watson figured Dobie must be onto something and hit a nerve to get the Colonel so worked up, but it didn't matter. The Major had his orders and dutifully came up with a plan

to wear Dobie down with agents planted in his audiences bombarding him with questions, heckling him, and creating overall negativity. Your basic harassment.

Phase Two was to set him up with beautiful women so far out of his league that, in his eagerness to impress them, Dobie would speak out of turn and reveal his secrets. A side benefit for Watson was to first date the women and make sure they were up to the task.

Charonne complimented his junior officer using women "as God intended. Pillow talk! Spy Craft 101!"

When none of that kept Dobie from touring, Charonne had Watson talk to the business owners Dobie was dealing with and warn them not to allow him on their premises to speak.

"Do your usual research," said the Colonel, "and I'll talk to some of my friends but, if a bookstore owner or hotel managers is gay, tell them Dobie is homophobic. If they're Jewish, say Dobie is anti-Semitic. If Black, he's racist, and so on.

"People used to let that crap roll off their backs, but now everyone is so easily offended. We'll use that to our advantage. Let's push people's buttons!"

Watson did just that, and it worked – especially with the corporate outlets but not as well with the independents. It became much more difficult for Dobie to book speaking gigs, but he powered forward.

Watson tried the same tactic with hotels and conference room providers, but it was not as successful with them. Seminars by charismatic leaders – corporate or otherwise – were a good chunk of their income.