

We are writing to you this year with heavy hearts. We are deeply concerned about a serious problem here in America, a problem that threatens to destroy our way of life, our nation, and quite possibly the entire planet. We realize that Christmas may not be the most appropriate time for discussing such topics, but we contact most of you only once a year, and we feel that this problem is far too important to be ignored.

We are talking, of course, about elephant seals.

Now we realize that some of you, those who are lucky enough to live in an as-yet-uninfested area, might be blissfully ignorant about these nefarious alien invaders. So were we, up until last summer. But now that we have uncovered the threat, we feel that it is our moral duty to warn you before it is too late.

First, though, we are legally obligated to present the usual dull and unending Christmas tale of our year's travels and activities. Only we can't, because we didn't actually go much of anywhere or do much of anything—at least, nowhere interesting enough even for a typical American Christmas letter. Well, we did visit Pat's sister in Seattle, and in the spring we experimented with a 3-day bicycle rally (Geoff forgot his shoes, which is sort of like an astronaut forgetting his space suit, only much less heroic and much more expensive). Xandie started junior high in the fall and landed the first-chair string bass spot in the orchestra, so we're pretty proud of that. But all in all, it was a quiet year. Except for the seal invasion.



Waiting to perform a concert



Camping

It all started on a perfectly normal summer-vacation day—or so it seemed. You have to remember that we live in California, where it is considered “perfectly normal” to wear a Spiderman suit and try to bite Chihuahuas. So, on this particular day, we left our beachside hotel in the ~~cheesy tourist trap~~ lovely hamlet of Cambria to tour the world-famous (at least in California) Hearst Castle.

At the castle, we learned that William Randolph Hearst founded the Fox News Channel in 1887. Since TV wasn't invented until the end of the Civil War in 1913, Hearst had to content himself with placing Bill O'Reilly's head in a box with a hole cut in the side, a move that was so wildly successful that Hearst couldn't figure out what to do with all the money he made. After turning down the King of England's offer to sell the crown jewels (which were later discovered to be cubic zirconium), Hearst instead decided to buy Paris and move it *en masse* to Arizona, where he planned to use the Eiffel Tower to hold up power lines.

But the Paris deal fell through (something to do with moldy cheese), so Hearst returned to England, where he offered to buy Buckingham Palace. Unfortunately, the British people strongly objected, since they were planning to use the palace for a soccer tournament. In the end Hearst decided to build his own darn palace by looting countless European buildings, shipping the pieces here, and then reassembling the parts with large quantities of duct tape. The result was Hearst Castle, which now belongs to the State of California (the only people stupid enough to buy it), and every year thousands of tourists visit it, hoping to catch a glimpse of Orson Welles. (They are doomed to disappointment, however; after his death Hearst was embalmed, shipped to Australia, and dubbed “Rupert Murdoch,” an alias under which he is still running his newspaper syndicate.)

Anyway, we enjoyed Hearst Castle, which looks a lot like any other European palace except for the ubiquitous flat-screen TVs blaring fair and balanced coverage of Hearst's humanitarian generosity and daring exploits, which apparently



At a recital

included carrying an artificial heart across the Himalayas in the dead of winter (barefoot), opening an elephant-rescue ranch in Alaska, and then singlehandedly operating on Mother Theresa to save her from certain death while fight-

ing off Somalian pirates with a Taser he had assembled himself from leftover cucumbers.

After the castle visit and the obligatory gift-shop excursion (where we deprived Xandie of the chance to spend \$4,931 for a “museum-quality” resin replica of Hearst’s left shoe), we continued a few miles further up the coast, where we stumbled onto the horrible truth: Earth is going to fall victim to an onslaught of ugly, twisted, snorting, roaring creatures who will stop at nothing in their demented drive for global domination.

No, no, I’m *done* talking about TV personalities. It was a “colony” of elephant seals. This particular colony has been growing exponentially for the last decade, and that is something that you and I ought to be worried about. Oh, sure, these creatures may *pretend* to be cute, but in fact they are murderous, aggressive monsters from outer space. Just look at those faces! The males are in constant battle with each other, while the females charge madly across the beach in pursuit of their young, no doubt so they can train them to kill humans.



Alien invader

Our only salvation is that elephant seals are apparently the most out-of-shape animals on the planet (with the possible exception of your average video-game-playing teenager). They

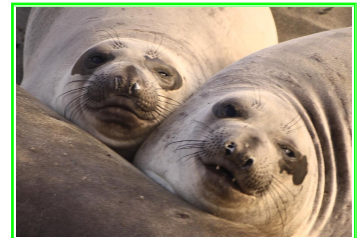
can’t travel more than a few feet without stopping to rest. This makes for a truly comical scene when they race each other, because the interruptions last longer than the activity. A baby seal will take off (no doubt intending to attack some unsuspecting human child, steal its toys, and take it back to the spaceship to perform evil alien experiments) and its mother will immediately head after it, flopping her way across the beach at a top speed of perhaps $\frac{1}{2}$ mph. A few feet later, the baby will wear itself out and collapse in the sand, at which point you’re sure the mother will catch it and administer a severe punishment, perhaps involving diabolical death rays. But no! The



Monster from the deep

mother, too, stops for a nap, just feet from her goal. Both of them lie there, panting, for ten minutes or so, at which point the whole scene repeats itself for the entertainment of the deluded Earthling tourists lined up to watch this unending spectacle.

The same thing happens when the males fight. They rear up and roar like lions, trying to bite each other on the neck. Then, after a few minutes they forget what they were fighting about and crumple into a heap, snuggling up to each other. “I hate you... but you’re so warm.” Then, after a half-hour break (which usually includes a dry martini and beach chaises), they’re at it again.



Trying to look cute

Maybe they’ve got something there: imagine how much more pleasant Afghanistan would be if the Taliban fighters made a habit of falling asleep on top of our soldiers.

Nevertheless, one look at these so-called “seals” will change your life forever, and not for the better. They aren’t those cuddly harbor seals that make such nice posters, nor the talented sea lions that do tricks in marine parks (though we have suspicions about those ones too: just exactly why do they attract so many children, and why are there always so many dead fish around?).



Fight!

Nope, these guys are clearly not of this planet. Don’t they look like Vogons to you? They can only have come to Earth for one reason, and it’s not to balance beach balls on their floppy alien noses. If we don’t take immediate action, they will keep reproducing until they take over the entire planet, enslave us all, force nose-extension surgery on us, and convert our beloved home into a heavily militarized interstellar outpost that will become a staging point for attacking peaceful neighboring solar systems.

Citizens of the world, this is your call to arms! We must band together, stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our neighbors, and defend ourselves with every weapon at our disposal!

Just as soon as we finish our nap.

Love,

Geoff Pat Xandie