

Protect the Little Children
by Phillip Hilliker
www.minotaurstudios.net

This file is licensed under a Creative Commons US Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike license:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/3.0/>

You are free:

- * to Share - to copy, distribute and transmit the work
- * to Remix - to adapt the work

Under the following conditions:

* Attribution - You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work).

* Noncommercial - You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

* Share Alike - If you alter, transform, or build upon this work, you may distribute the resulting work only under the same or similar license to this one.

With the understanding that:

* Waiver- Any of the above conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

* Other Rights - In no way are any of the following rights affected by the license:

- * Your fair dealing or fair use rights;
- * The author's moral rights;
- * Rights other persons may have either in the work itself or in how the work is used, such as publicity or privacy rights.
- * Notice - For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.

Wording of license intro taken from author Cory Doctorow. Find his work at www.craphound.com

#####

Protect the Little Children

I grow old and have a need to explain my actions to future generations. It's been forty-five years since we started putting our children into the high-level quarantine facility. While it may seem somewhat cruel, while those who don't understand our situation would question our experiments on them, I assure you, we have had no choice in the matter. The hopeful results of these previously unthinkable acts are no less than the very continuation of the human race. Without such extreme measures, we surely would have perished as a species already.

The children are powerless against their natural pull towards the aliens. These cruel aliens that have forced us to do such unspeakable things. Curse them. Curse them straight to hell for what they've done to us.

We must find a way to break the children of their love for the aliens. We have been resolutely unsuccessful until now and we have only the smallest glimmers of hope that things will improve any time soon. Things most certainly won't be totally corrected during my lifetime; I can be positive of that sad conclusion. I should know. I'm the poor bastard who has been the head of this terrible project for the last 30 years. I was given the terrible honor after the last project head threw himself into the merciless maw of these creatures in suicidal despair.

I pray that, when I die, if there is a God, he will forgive me for what I have had to do. I have no other choice. It is done with the best of intentions and for the survival of our species. What else am I to do? If some sort of God does exist and he rejects my broken soul, at least I've damned myself in the hopes of saving others.

Besides, only the most cruel of all tyrannical deities would instill in children such a love of all things round and then create a horrific being that could so easily exploit that love.

Why, oh, why do these aliens have to look exactly like the balls used in our most beloved sports? Basketballs! Soccer balls! Tennis balls! Footballs! Even bocce balls! They've covered them all! They have species that somehow, through a terrible act of fate, has replicated them all!

Even after all of this time it feels like to trick of the cruelest devil imaginable.

When the first aliens arrived, we had no idea. They just appeared one day. Sitting innocently in the middle of our fields. Quietly. Waiting.

They had studied our species. They knew our proclivities and went right to the places where they could do the most damage. They went to our parks. They waited on our school playgrounds. They rolled onto our front lawns.

Excited children were released for recess only to discover their play spots completely covered in new balls to play with. Their joy, their horrible short-lived joy, was barely contained in their chests as they burst forward to use their new playthings. Confused, the teachers on monitor duty all around the world looked at each other and began to question where such a bounty of new sporting equipment came from. While the children ran to meet their fate, the adults had worry in their minds.

The children reached out their hands in friendship only to have them bitten off by their objects of affection. The size of the ball determined the amount of initial damage. While a basketball could bite up to mid-forearm, baseballs could easily remove half a hand. And the beach balls... Oh, God. The beach balls.

Panic enveloped every corner of the globe for days after the first terrible massacre. School was cancelled. Children were locked indoors. The adults, who, as a whole, were generally more resistant to the pull of activity that balls inspire, went on a hunting spree. They would stalk for days through their neighborhoods with guns, swords, sharp sticks and anything they could wield to destroy these monsters.

The Great Hunt, as it came to be known, was an ugly task. The ubiquity of balls is quite astounding. They're everywhere! You don't realize it until you have to exterminate them all.

Add to that the emotional distress. No one knew what to trust anymore. Was that ball innocently sitting there an actual ball or a secret invader from another planet? It was too hard to tell. Was that ball in the attic some forgotten relic from past glory days or was it a basketball-shaped alien laying in wait?

The aliens generally took two defensive courses. Many tried to roll or bounce away upon discovery. That only made their guilt and liveliness more apparent, making them more of a target. Others would just sit there, innocently enticing one to have a kick and a laugh. Woe be to your foot though if you took the bait as you would soon be walking with a permanent limp for the rest of your life.

When we would strike only to deflate a perfectly innocent ball, we would relax a bit. Killing the things was an ugly business. They would let out the most horrible screech. And since they were mostly stomach, their half-digested contents would spew all over the place, often out to a diameter of up to 5 feet wide.

Within a month, as the extermination continued unabated, with no end in sight, it was decided that all ball factories should be shut down. All manufacturing had to be stopped. We were just creating more camouflage for them to hide behind. We learned that these beasts were chameleon-like in their biology. We tried changing the colors of the balls to something outlandish, something we thought the aliens couldn't possibly replicate. It was a harsh lesson when members of Portugal and Ireland's national soccer teams had their feet eaten by a particularly nasty pink and yellow sphere.

All major sports were put on permanent sabbatical. The world economy went to the edge of collapse. We never understood just how important professional sports and the sales of their chotchkies, including jerseys, bobble heads and themed housewares were to our financial health. What were men expected to watch while drinking beer and eating pizza? While actually using balls wasn't a part of the typical adult male experience; watching other people do it while pretending the viewers could was apparently vital.

We no longer had a national pastime. We didn't have college tournaments and complicated brackets. Work productivity should have increased with the decline of such distractions. Instead, a national ennui nearly ground everything to a halt.

Sensing the desperation of the people, the government pushed new hobbies and pastimes. People half-heartedly picked up badminton and crew. But shuttlecocks and team boat rowing were poor substitutions. Everyone knew it. The Senate's new Permanent Sub-Committee on the Investigation Into New Sport held hearings. Gymnastics was soundly ignored. Triathlons were declared too boring for viewers. Every ball-less Olympic sport was passed up. If no one cared about them every four years, what hope was there that any sort of successful regular season could be established? And still, among all the chaos, hockey ranked as the country's fourth most popular professional sport. It just couldn't catch a break.

Luckily there was NASCAR, which suddenly gripped the spirit of the country like never before. It was previously popular but it reached new heights as it became the primary distraction for the nation.

The entire time, new balls were arriving, only to be hunted. Old balls were being destroyed. Children were being homeschooled and kept indoors. We couldn't take the chance that, if they were to be let outside, the children wouldn't come into contact with an innocent looking bowling ball that wanted to eat their faces.

We eventually decided to lock all the children in high security facilities, to cut them off from the world. Parents were understandably confused and upset. The last stragglers finally came around when a group of militia families

living in the woods lost their children to an abandoned tether ball. If armed militia parents couldn't protect their kids, the average suburban parents didn't stand a chance.

We had to cure the children of this obsessive love of all things bouncy and round. We needed to channel their desire for play into other, less menacing objects. We tried many experiments on them. The results were never pretty. Often my days were hard. Who wants to spend days upon days torturing children? But it was for their own good. I had to keep telling myself the consequences if we were to fail.

And fail we did. Group after group of children we believed cured were released into the world only to run right towards the objects that wanted to eat them. Too many people in the world are limbless because of my failed attempts at a solution.

We tried giving the children electrically-charged balls that would shock when touched. It was a disastrous attempt at negative reinforcement. Instead of avoiding the balls, the children invented a game where they threw the electric balls at each other in a new form of dodge ball. Sure, the thrower would get shocked but so would the victim. The schadenfreude made the pain worth it for them.

We tried yelling. We hit the kids with paddles. We drugged them with everything under the sun. And every experimental group we released lost body parts. Parents were growing more and more wary and haggard.

We tried totally secluding the children from balls so they had no idea what they were. This only delayed the obsession to a more mature age. When balls were finally introduced experimentally, those in their late teens would regress into a whiny toddler. It seemed that ball obsession was an important developmental stage for humans to traverse.

We finally settled on allowing the children to play with certain guaranteed alien-free balls within the walls of the quarantine facility. When we believed that each child had outgrown their natural pull, we would allow them into the world on a case-by-case basis. It was expensive and time consuming. And some particularly challenged males were never allowed to leave the facility. Poor men in their 30's and 40's living with children all because they couldn't give up golf.

Luckily we've had the rise of video games over the last few years. Once we get them hooked on the games, they have no desire to run or play outside. The glowing electric boxes quickly become their sole focus. Balls no longer exist to them.

We begin a program at the age of 5 where they are given all of the video games

they desire. After a few months, they are released back to their parents and live in a self-inflicted quarantine at home. We pray this newfound laziness never abates.

Sure, they gain all sorts of weight and have health issues. Yes, they become more self-involved and lose their social skills. All of those things are a small price to pay for the continuation of our species.

Hopefully video-game-shaped aliens never arrive.

It's not a final solution but it buys us time to continue our work. May the future bring a permanent cure.

With Many Regrets,
Dr. Armand Christensen