

# **Excerpts From “An Oral History of the Rise of the Terran Empire.”**

*From Chapter 3: The Nightmare of Bread and Beer.*

**Professor Anjali Kavle, Department of Genetics,  
University of Delhi:**

It was very exciting to meet aliens for the first time, and even more so when we realized that they were far more closely genetically related to humans than we expected. By ‘closely related’ I of course do not mean that any Galactic alien species would be interfertile with humanity, no matter what trashy films tell us. But it is now clear that almost all life in the Galaxy that has evolved on oxygen-nitrogen planets also has a common ancestor. And that people say ‘almost’ only because not even the most advanced Galactic races have checked every Earthlike world.

Obviously this common ancestry meant that, once the implications were understood, every medical and biological organization in the world would go to and stay at a high state of alert. If the aliens were our remote

relatives, then so were their diseases. And we knew that the aliens were equally at risk.

Which they turned out to be. But we couldn't have known.

**James Longpoint, Canadian Trade Commissioner Service (Ret.):**

Yes, many people blame me for causing the whole problem. Hell, sometimes I blame myself. But I was only the guy who lit the fuse, and only because I thought that it was just a cigarette.

When First Contact was made, I remember that everybody at the office being on an emotional roller coaster. First, shock: there really were aliens. A whole *galaxy* of them. Then we got happy, because they'd want to trade with us, right? But then we got sad, because we thought we wouldn't be able to sell them the usual things, because they're aliens and probably wouldn't like them. And then we were happy again, because the aliens turned out to be almost all descended from the same germs that we're from, so they could eat our food, probably.

And we **knew** that food and drink would be the way to go. Trade in the bigger Galaxy was apparently big or little: you either sold planets, or gimcracks. But there was money in gimcracks: with that big a market, *somebody* was going to want to buy it. Or, as we got told quickly, or maybe *somebody* that wasn't so friendly might come by with big ships to **take** it, so we should maybe get those trade deals locked down with the nice aliens pretty damn quick, right?

So when I got tapped to help do a product tasting for the Bluehead delegation - remember, they don't mind being called that - I of course grabbed everything local I could find. I didn't care if it was high-end or low-end; my job was to find something that the aliens would like. And, yeah, of course I made sure to include a case of Molson beer. Why wouldn't I? Everybody in the office wanted to try alien booze, so the aliens would want to do the same, right?

Well... everybody except me. I don't drink, because my ancestors got hammered by the stuff. Ironic, yeah? And that's why some people blame me; they think I should have known better. And, shoot: maybe I should have.

## **Virginia Smith, Deputy Chief of Police, Toronto Police Service:**

Bearing in mind that the TPS got called in about four hours after the incident occurred and about three hours after *we should* have got called in, this is, as best as we can tell, what happened: the four members of the Bloohved trade assessment group that were assigned to Canada sat down to sample the local food. They'd already scanned for bacteria and poisonous trace elements, so they assumed that all they had to worry about were possible allergic reactions, and maybe eating something that tasted disgusting. So, everything was fine until they tried the beer.

I'm not going to sugar-coat what happened next: the Bloohveds acted like idiots. Which is exactly how I'd describe four human beings who slammed six beers apiece in fifteen minutes, then started in on a bottle of rye whisky until they were roaring drunk. That they did not crash their 'flying car' - God, that's going to be a nightmare when we finally get those - on the way to a liquor store to get more alcohol was a miracle. But they still managed to put their car through the store window, of course. That's when their government handlers showed up and tried to handle the situation. It wasn't until one of the Bloohveds

started vomiting on passerby that they finally called in the **real** cops.

What did we do? What do you think that we did? We arrested them for drunk driving, public intoxication, and making a nuisance. Which is what they were doing.

**Andrew Gordon, PhD, Center for Disease Control:**

Strictly speaking, there are no alcoholics among the other races of the Galaxy. They simply don't have the genes to be physically addicted to ethyl alcohol, apparently. And how could they have them? Ethyl alcohol is unique to Earth. Well, it was at the time. While most sentient species apparently have local intoxicants, none of them had anything that was really like ethanol.

I don't understand how that could happen, either - well, I can, but it was still strange. Apparently the various yeast strains that cause fermentation are unique to Earth's ecosystem. So, no alcohol - also, no bread, which caused even more of a social upheaval when it hit the Galactic markets, but that was never the CDC's problem.

I still insist that the alcohol issue wasn't really the CDC's problem, either. The Galactics aren't suffering from any kind of disease: they just can't hold their liquor.

Earth medical personnel had more important things to worry about, like the Arcturian Paraflu or Spacer Measles or the Broad-Spectrum Death. What, you've never heard of them? Well, you're welcome. Just like the galaxy never heard of shingles or whooping cough. That was our job, and we were there to do it. Not nurse hangovers in aliens. What they really needed was counseling, anyway.

**“John Smith,” drug counselor, Department of Mental Hygiene, Bloohved Polity:**

The appearance of your alcoholic beverages in Galactic culture was... trying to people in my field. We fortunately did not have to deal with any physical addicts, but there were plenty of people with addictive personalities, or who simply grew psychologically addicted to ethyl alcohol. At first, those people were at least easy enough to deal with: if we could identify them, we could treat them, and we knew how to treat them.

But the real problem came from people who were not mentally predisposed to be addicted to alcohol. The lack of physical dependency encouraged many people from my

species -- from many, many species -- to assume that they could drink as much as they liked without long-term danger. So alcohol consumption became a fad, typically coupled with bad decision making, because apparently that's what alcohol does. And when some of those people started developing psychological addictions, Mental Hygiene practitioners got overworked quickly. And then people started believing that alcohol had some sort of mystical element to it -- good, bad, or both -- and that's when the rioting started.

I don't exactly blame your species for nearly toppling our government. I would like to, but it would be unfair. From your point of view, alcohol is a perfectly-normal, admittedly-dangerous, but essentially-known recreational chemical. To us, it is this mysterious, exotic drug that can drive men mad. Even now our entertainment providers use alcohol as a plot device to explain away any poor decision in a video or audio show.

And do not get me started on your 'pizza.'

**Anhexlina Berisha, Specialist, INTERPOL Tirana:**

Honestly, we were expecting to be dealing with heroin and cocaine smuggling. It made sense, yes? There were

existing networks and established smuggling routes; all that would change would be who bought the final product. And, yes, there were a number of drug transactions between humans and Galactics. What we and the smugglers did not realize was that the Galactics were simply buying samples that they could synthesize themselves: in fact, they acquired rather more narcotics from official public health organizations, under the understanding that they would use those samples to synthesize effective addiction blockers for those drugs. Which they quickly did, and even cheaply did. So we were happy enough; at least things were not going to be really **worse** because of First Contact.

And then we found out about the alcohol problem. 'Nightmare' does not begin to describe the current situation. Anybody with the right yeast and a basic knowledge of chemistry - or ability to read directions - can make gallons of ethanol, of course: but genuine Terran alcohol? There are many, many hypocritical Galactics in power or wealth that wish to drink our wines and whiskeys. And they will **pay** for "Verified Earth *alkool*." It does not help that alcohol remains legal on most of Earth. Or that it was and is legal to sell it to Galactics, even if it is not legal for Galactics to purchase it. Too many polities on Earth, and every one of them knew that if they did not permit the



Galactics their *alkool*, some other nation would. It was not until the smugglers became absolutely brazen that Earth chose to act at all.

**Nderim Papazisi, expatriate Albanian and Lifetime Hammer-Lord of the Ninety-Seventh Island of the Hef'kiti Continental Dominion:**

...You must understand: I never touched alcohol myself, even before First Contact. Neither did I traffic in narcotics, because such things were an abomination in the eyes of Allah, peace be unto Him. I was a man who simply... knew how to get various items from one place to another without constantly pestering various overworked government officials. So there were understandings in place. And since everyone knew their place, there were no troubles. Mostly. Business was not always smooth. But we were not interested in causing trouble.

*Alkool* was trouble from the start. I could make my men not smuggle heroin or cocaine. I would tell them, *There was too much risk. Too many who would see the white powder and become violent beasts without ever even sniffing a scrap of it.* And if they did not see the truth of my words, well, I always knew those who would take on another greedy fool. But alcohol? You could buy it in the

stores! After the Galactics came, you could even pay the taxes on it, openly drive it through the checkpoints, and still make a hefty profit.

But what the Galactics wanted was reliability. And I was reliable, while still being unwilling to tell the police anything that they needed to hear, which was usually nothing at all. And I could be paid in Galactic technology and artifacts, which my connections in all the governments were always eager to buy. So they started pestering me to permit shipments.

I knew that it was not permitted of me to transport alcohol. So I forbade it. But I did not forbid my men to transport yeast, or hops, or sugars, or anything that might conceivably be used for fermentation. And I did not ask questions when the ever-higher and higher profits came back to me, even though those profits were easily more than one might expect from even yeast, which was reliably worth its weight in plutonium in those days. Because I was not interested in causing trouble.

But trouble came to us all nonetheless. And, of course, when it did, it came in the form of politics. Give me an honest murderer and thief, any day.

**Elise Maes, former Chair Pro-Tem of the United Nations Alien Treaty Obligation Working Group:**

Too much money. My colleagues from the developing nations laughed until they cried. There was too much money being thrown at us, and even the saints among our number could not stop the flood. There are over ten thousand polities that can easily reach Earth, and every one of them had a ship or twenty of adventurers ready to spend a lot of money here to get the goods that they could sell for maddening amounts of money there.

Still, we tried our best. Put that on the memorial of the United Nations, when the Americans finally live out their wildest dream and demolish the building in order to make way for a sports stadium. "We tried."

**"Luminiferous Ether," anonymous website owner (Festum Stultorum):**

The Americans were right, damn them: the United Nations collapsed at its first **real** test. It was to be expected, yes? Those who set up the UN had won their war, they had no interest in sharing power with the losers and the nations who did not fight, and then the whole thing

was left to rot in the sun for almost a century. So of course the rats and the mold won in the end.

But at the same time the Galactics expected *somebody* to speak for Earth. The charming naivete of them, thinking that a group that had all the **nations** of the planet - and the Zionist entity - avowedly **united** in the best interests of Earth meant that the organization could tell the USA or the PRC what to do! And, damn the Americans for being right again: nobody in the UN was ready to tell the Galactics that the UN existed on sufferance. So when all the existing, contradictory promises made by United Nations bureaucrats were finally exposed, we were so busy screaming at the fools that put us in that situation that we never considered what fools might follow.

**Gladys Shapiro, White House Press Secretary:**

The United States Government has no comment at this time on either the matter of the Chakri Dynasty of Thailand, or on any current claim by the Queen of Thailand to also be the Empress of Terra.

**Méiyǒu Rén, private citizen of the People's Republic of China:**

Of *course* the Americans picked a suitable figurehead. Or rather, we and the Americans did. In fact, the Americans offered to tacitly support the claim of a 'legitimate' Chinese Emperor, if only we could find one from somewhere. It was a gratifyingly subtle trap; but then, the Americans have been trading on their ability to assume a guileless expression at need for centuries.

Flattery aside, the Thai Dynasty was much better for our purposes: it had a reasonable and personable heir of the right age, once her aimless father got himself killed in a helicopter crash. Not European, which mattered to the rest of the planet; but educated in the West, which mattered to America and Europe. And it was understood by all that the sovereignty of the larger nations would be scrupulously respected... and that the defense of the Empire would be guaranteed by the very two nations that adamantly refused to officially admit that they were subject to the Empire at all.

The Terran Empire was to be a polite fiction, in other words. But it became just a little bit *less* of a fiction with every passing year. Of course, that might also be due to the war...

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