

GORILLAS IN OUR MIDST
By Paul Lambrecht

"Sir, the Russian submarine has surfaced off the coast of Virginia," said Jack Tweed, the President's chief of staff.

He picked up the first telephone.

The President chopped the air in half with his hand quickly.

"Put down the phone, Jack. I'm expecting a call."

"Yessir," replied Jack, settling the phone back in its cradle. "Sir?"

The President put a finger to his lips. "Shoosh," he said.

Silence prevailed for a very short time.

The President returned to his seat in the corner, where at a table set before him were the day's newspapers, scissors, tape, glue, glitter, and photo corners. The President loved scrapbooking.

His deputy shook his head.

"Mr. President, what are we going to do about the Russians, sir?"

The President cocked his head and appeared to consider this.

"Where's Cathy?" he asked declaratively. Cathy was nicer to him. He craved her cautious feline approach.

"She's on the Cape with her husband, sir."

The President exhaled heavily. He scratched the hide of one of his large floppy ears.

"Call together the gang in the situation room then patch me through on a video link. I'm still waiting for a phone call."

Jack Tweed nodded and left the room smartly.

The President had been losing touch lately. The unringing squat white telephone stood at him staring, accusing him.

He affixed a clipping of a photo of himself staring boldly off into the horizon of history onto a fresh white square page. The very shining burnished image of decisiveness and gravitas under pressure.

The AV crew rolled in a satellite video link up now and set it in the center of the room.

The President pulled out a small black plastic comb, ran it through his hair, straightened out his powerful dark blue suit, and tried to think the thought which always plastered a trademark sulky smirk on his face.

"Ladies and Gentlemen," he said to the deeply attentive crowd clustered around a corner of the large table in the situation room, all trying to jam in the frame. "The Russian submarine has appeared off the coast of Virginia. I want a task force formed immediately to assess this very grave threat. And I want its initial summary conclusions by [he looked at his watch... Mickey Mouse was pointing towards...] Thursday [was three days away]."

He waved away the video link now to the astonishment of the AV crew and the no-less stunned faces populating the screen.

He resumed his spot at the scrapbooking station. Now where to put this hilarious Garfield comic?

The Russians were impatiently waiting for a flyover of pissed-off Apache helicopter pilots, or any form of official US response, really. When no such welcome wagon materialized, they waited even more impatiently for their commander's decision. The commander wiped his enormous bulbous red nose with a handkerchief. He was confused.

"Very well," he said, after a hairy perplexed moment. "We will move up the Potomac," he said mentally rewriting the arcane Cyrillic naval manual bolstering its appendices in his mind.

They resurfaced about twenty yards from the Jefferson Memorial. Shocked stands of tourists gaped at them mouths agog, slack-jawed with thawed Cold War awe.

A breathless Jack Tweed burst into the President's scrapbooking room.

"The Russians have surfaced in the city," he exclaimed. "News cameras are on the way. We have to beat'em down there," he bellowed in near-apocalyptic fear.

"News cameras?" replied the unflappable President.

The cable channels had to cut away from a hastily produced bashful shoddily translated and rather pedantic interview with the enormous red bulbous-nosed Russian submarine commander to carry the President's remarks on the situation from the Rose Garden.

"My fellow Americans," he began. "I stand before you in a time of great trial for our nation..." He always began this way while waiting for his teleprompter to rise to eye level from the ground with his prepared remarks. There. "Our liberty and our way of life are under threat from..." he read, then almost choked over the next prompt. Almost, but his throat recovered and waited for his head to catch up, cucumber-cool.

"Russian Gorillas??? What the hell? Jack!" he roared dispassionately.

Jack was sweating bullets, his hands folded neatly in front of him, supportively arrayed solicitously in a solid arc with the peppery burgeoning media horde. He furtively approached his commander-in-chief and they traded whispers.

"What the hell do Russian monkeys have to do with this?"

"Russian guerillas, sir. Sorry, sir," he said sighting a look of hurried non-comprehension crossing the

president's features. "Say rogue elements of the Russian military, instead, sir."

Jack receded sheepishly back into the media antimatter again like a man in a cheap gaudy suit who enters a room with cheap gilded wallpaper.

"Sorry," continued the President to America's viewing public, "This is a very fluid situation. Not Russian gorillas. Rogue elephants in the Russian military, right Jack?"

Jack's face was now buried in his hands. He hadn't had quite this feeling since thinking he'd got his fifteen-year-old girlfriend pregnant all those years ago.

Thankfully for him, there was a dazzling explosion nearby now, which took the focus off the President defaming Russian menagerie animals, followed by a bright display of phosphorescent light. Then the Washington Memorial yawned, creaked, and toppled over, as the cameras all panned away from the flustered flummoxed fumbling President and caught the fall and clouds of debris rising up behind the various chattering news producers holding their hands to their mouths.

"We're under attack, Mr. President," announced Jack Tweed, solemnly materializing at the president's side. The TV president knew what he had to do. To one camera which

remained trained on him and his reaction, as if it were a documentary on leadership and grace under fire, he said in a steely voice, heir to history:

"Now Jack, you're frightening people. How about a cabinet level "Russian Czar" post? Get the Secretary of State on the phone. This requires immediate direct diplomacy."

Jack Tweed nodded obligingly. The Washington Monument now pointed the country in a fresh new direction.

END.