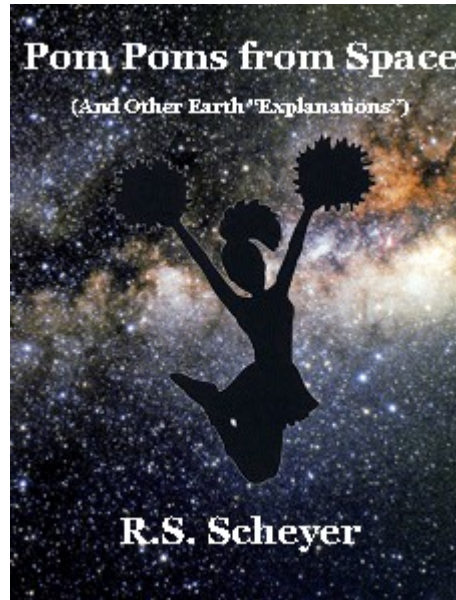


Pom Poms from Space



What would an alien from another time and space report back to their homeland if they were transported into the middle of an American football game? How would they communicate what they are seeing back to the homeland? Let's find out:

Alley: Homeston, Homeston, can you read me? Homeston?

Homeston: This is Homeston, Alley. We are finally getting things working on this end. Can you read us?

Alley: Yes, Homeston, we have a problem.

Homeston: Whoa, you think you got problems. We can just barely hear you and the video isn't even working at all.

Aliens: Yes, Homeston, I believe we've made it through the transponder, and, according to our calculations, have ended up on the blue orb, the third planet from the star known as Ramulden. If I am not mistaken and for the record, I believe the local inhabitants call this place earth.

Homeston: Yes, hello Alley, we are reading you, although there is quite a bit of interference but it appears to be coming from your end. Describe to us what you are seeing. Is there, as we suspected, intelligent life there?

Aliens: Yes, the noise you hear is coming from our location. There is quite a bit of it, as you suggest. Intelligent life, yes, good question. I'm thinking it depends on how you define "intelligent." Let me put it this way: there is life here and plenty of it and they are making a lot of noise which is the continual dull roar you are hearing in the background. We appear to have ended up in some sort of sporting contest. Well, there appear to be several activities involving competition going on simultaneously.

Homeston: What sort of competition? Are they competing for food sources? Is it some sort of life and death struggle?

Aliens: Yes, there are some food sources about but they are in amongst the spectators and it does appear like they are competing for something as they too are doing a lot of yelling. But that is secondary to the actual event.

Homeston: Well, what could be more important than food and resources?

Aliens: Well, they appear to be competing over a brown and white orb of some sort. It has a peculiar shape. At least that appears to be the focus of everyone's attention. To some extent, anyway, it is hard to explain without the video.

Homeston: Yes, we are working on that end of it now. We think we've located the problem.

Aliens: Yes, let me see if I can give you a verbal description of what is standing right in front of us: there are these Earthlings, clearly of the female variety, and they are doing, ah, what do I want to call it, a dance of some sort. Jumping around in unison and twirling. Then, on the end of their hands are these, ah, these, ah things.

(BUZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ, thwack, reception lost for the moment)

(We pick up the dialogue after a brief problem with the transmission between Homeston, Alley's home planet, and our resident Alien, Alley.)

Alley: Yes, let me see if I can give you a verbal description of what is standing right in front of us: there are these Earthlings, clearly of the female variety, and they are doing, ah, what do I want to call it, a dance of some sort. Jumping around in unison and twirling. Then, on the end of their hands are these, ah, these, ah things.

Homeston: Got it, we have video. Ah, yes, I see what you mean. Definitely of the female variety. I thought you said the video would help, because we are still not sure as to the exact nature of this resource gathering. Let me run it through the Earth Explainer. Okay, we have something for you. Apparently, these are what are called "cheerleaders."

Alley: So, what the Earth Explainer is saying is that these females types that lead the onlookers in being cheerful, because, yea, some people look downright angry, while others are well cheering but not in unison with the female types in front of us.

Homeston: Well as you know, the Earth Explainer oft times has some pretty cryptic explanations because it is telling us from observation of many light years away. That is why we sent you there, to help us understand the nuances and deeper meanings and things of significance.

Alley: Significance, ummmm, interesting idea. Yea, I didn't realize the expedition would prove this difficult. Indeed, there is something that the cheerleaders are holding. It is difficult to describe: looks like jangly, feathery things connected to their hands in some fashion. Yea, that doesn't quite do it. I will point the camera and zoom in on them. See what the Earth Explainer has to say about the things they appear to be holding.

Homeston: Yes, we have input the picture and are waiting for a response. Yes, interesting, those things are called, huh, I think this is correct: pom poms.

Alley: Pom poms huh. What exactly does the earth explainer say they are for?

Homeston: The Earth Explainer is not exactly sure. Apparently for some sort of emphasis on their movements or something.

Alley: So, let me get this straight. These so called cheerleaders, who are leading a bunch of people who are both angry and cheering but not actually in unison with the cheerleaders, although some people close by are looking rather intently at these female types, but mostly just looking, anyway, to emphasize the thing that people are somewhat cheering at, they are holding large things that essentially defy description. Am I getting anywhere near on this?

Homeston: Yes, without the video, I confess we'd be somewhat lost. Or at least have trouble believing what you are describing.

Alley: Wait, hold on the action from the field is coming our way.

Homeston: (The video takes a sudden turn for the worst, rolling and blacking out.) Alley, Alley, are you still there? We've lost video again, but it appears to be coming from your end.

Alley: Yes, well, the players, who by the way are all dressed up in an interesting array of protective gear, apparently to protect themselves from each other, which doesn't make a lot of sense you know, because they can just stop doing what they are doing and not need the gear. That is assuming they have a choice, but anyway, that brown orb thing I was telling you about suddenly came our way and a lot of the players on the field of play, of course, came after it. I didn't see exactly what happened, but apparently, someone threw it this direction and the next thing I know is we are being pushed over for no good reason at all. Although some effort was made to avoid us. Then, apparently, from what I could make out some sort of foul occurred as yellow rags appeared out of nowhere and several of the players started pushing and shoving each other. Which again appeared rather unorthodox because they are wearing plenty of gear to protect them from contact. Then, as things got stranger, the people without any protective clothing, but dressed in a manner that is different than anyone on the field or in the stadium, they

look like some sort of striped animal, stepped in between these people with all the protective clothing on. Homeston, are you getting this?

Homeston: Uh, umm, you are not making much sense, which you do appear to realize. You said, that a group of people dressed in protective clothing are chasing a brown orb from which no one needs protection, but everyone wants it. Then you said that all these earthlings in protective clothing came colliding into you and you are not wearing protective gear. Then, some sort of skirmish broke out, apparently that is why these people are wearing protective gear, but some people who look like stripped animals and wearing no protective gear threw yellow useless pieces of clothing around and stood between these people to stop them from doing what they are doing and why they are wearing protective gear?

Ally: Eeeeh, close enough. But that is not the strangest part.

Homestead: There is something more unusual than that?

Alley: Yes, this is a bit hard to explain too. So, when those guys fell down all around us, another one came from the field and it seemed like he did something over and above what was supposed to have happened. Which, this is my assumption, is why they threw their useless laundry on the field. Apparently, it is already pretty clean. Then one of the men dressed as striped animals moved to the center of the field, made some hand motions, and according to the voice modulator, said, "Unnecessary roughness."

Homestead: I'm sorry, what?

Alley: Yea, that's right, according to the voice modulator, which I am rechecking the calibration on right now, he said, "Unnecessary roughness."

Homestead: uhmmmm, from our observations here, the entire thing that they are doing on the field appears to be unnecessary roughness in every respect. Especially if they are not doing it for any obvious food or resource gain.

Alley: Well, that is what I was thinking too. So, I went over to the guy, after things had quieted down a bit, and I asked through the voice modulator if he thought that what he did was unnecessary.

Homestead: Are you sure you should be wearing the voice modulator in front of people? Won't people think it strange that you are wearing a funny looking device on your face?

Alley: No, there are plenty of people around here wearing things much more unusual on their own faces than a voice modulator. Anyway, he was a bit hard to understand, especially at first. The voice translator could not make out some of the words he was using. Basically, the gist of his reply was that the only necessary roughness he'd been doing all day had just occurred but he still received some sort of penalty from it.

Homestead: Well, since it was some sort of violence perpetrated against humanity, what was the penalty? It must have been pretty severe?

Alley: Yea, that was the other unusual thing. Basically, they took that brown orb that everyone seems focused on and moved it in a certain direction that made some people happy and others downright angry. In fact, a man on the other side of the field, a man of some prominence it would appear, is downright livid about the movement of the ball.

Homestead: Ummmmm, boy, you have really lost us now. I will enter these parameters into the Earth Explainer and see what it comes up with. Well, that is very odd indeed. The Earth Explainer says it is very upset about the situation too, and refuses to even begin to explain the actions that have just occurred there.

Alley: The Earth Explainer is upset?! It's a machine?

Homestead: Yes, I told the programmers not to let it get anywhere near a place called "Texas." In the brief video we've had from there they always appear to be making obscene jesters. Apparently, they didn't listen, saying the Earth Explainer needed all different kinds of input and exposure. Now, I guess it says it has its own prejudices on the matter and that will not help in the explanation and thus, it will give none.

Alley: The Earth Explainer is not going to do us a whole lot of good if it can't see past its own prejudices.

Homestead: Hey, it's all we got. And I'm still a bit confused on a few points of your explanation. You are saying that these earthlings are in a major struggle but it is not over food, water or important resources? And there is also apparently actual unnecessary roughness as opposed to the roughness that is necessary?

Alley: Well, there is plenty of food about and some sort of odd colored liquid being consumed by the spectators. So no, if it were over food and water, there should be some sort of shortage of it I presume.

Homestead: So would you say the struggle appears very intense; or is it just some game they are playing.

Alley: Ah, that would be a yes.

Homestead: Well, we don't have the time now to sort this whole thing out. Perhaps, though, we can get some more information from those so called cheerleaders. Maybe it has something to do with what they are holding in their hands. Maybe they are some sort of secret weapon or something. Why don't you approach one of them and ask for more details.

Alley: Yes, well, that may prove to be somewhat difficult as they appear to be in some sort of perpetual movement and it has a certain unison about it that is hard to describe. Wait, they appear to have paused for a moment, I'll see if I can approach one and chat with them.

Alley: (There is some jostling of the video and some muffled sounds and pushing noises.) Wait, what, hey, leave me alone. (More muffled sounds.)

Homeston: Alley, you alright. Alley, do you read us, over.

Alley: Yea, it's okay. When I began to approach the lady pom-pom person several people wearing all the same color of jacket stepped in between us and began pushing us back. Oh, wait a moment, one of the lady pom-pom people is beckoning me over and asking the jacket man to let me through. Hold on a moment, looks like I have permission to chat with one of them anyway. (another moment of silence and then the camera is semi out of focus on the cheerleader's neck. A conversation ensues, but only Alley the Alien can be heard)

Alley: Yes, thank you for allowing me to chat with you a moment. I'm what, sorry, what did you say? Oh, I'm sort of cute with the green hair and Mar's red complexion, whatever that is. Well, my guess is that you are sort of cute for an earthling. Anyway, if you don't mind, I'd like to ask you what exactly is it that you do. Yes, I have been told that you do cheerleading, but what, if I may ask, is that exactly. (Pause) Helping people root for their team. Ummm, when you use the word "root" there, are you referring to plant parts or something else. (Pause) I see, Siss, boom, bah, rah, rah, rah, is what you are referring to. Yes, well, if you say so. That must somehow explain it.

Well, I would ask as to what exactly makes you think the earthlings here in the audience need help, but I have noticed that they do need help in certain areas alright, but what I'm more interested in is what exactly are those things you are continually carrying around on the end of your hands? I see, they are called "pom-poms or I guess another word for them is pom poms, with an "n." Thank you, and what exactly is their function? Oh, I see, accentuate movements. Well, uhmmm, it appears like your body already has enough accentuated movement, but I guess if that is what you think you need. Let me ask you one more question, and I hope it doesn't appear to awkward, but is there anything that you are doing that helps in the obtaining of resources and/or food? (Long pause here) I'm just going to take that as a no. But thanks for the explanation and yes, you remind me of my pets back home too.

Homestead: Well, we've been running this through the Earth Explainer as to whether or not this has anything to do with food or resource gain and the EE said that 600 cows are needed each year to make that brown orb everyone is running after.

Alley: Yea, what are cows and where are they here if they need so many of them to make such a small orb. Like they must be pretty small to begin with.

Homestead: Well, never mind about that now. What we are interested in, only because the Earth Explainer is making little sense here, are the rules of this game. Why don't you see if you can talk to someone along the sideline there and see if someone can explain the rules a little more clearly? We already did discover that there is a lot of unnecessary roughness both on and off the field. We are quite interested in this one penalty called, "illegal procedure." We want to know how a procedure that has nothing to do with resource gain can suddenly become illegal.

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Alley: Yes, well, I'm thinking first we will need to know the main goal or intent of the game before we can understand the finer points. So, here is someone close to me holding a sign with numbers on it that he keep changing and it looks like it has something to do with the movement of the ball. Yea, I don't think I'd better disturb him. He keeps moving anyway and at unexpected times. I'll ask someone nearby and see if they can help us. Here, I'll let you in on the conversation, Homestead via the spy line.

Homestead: Well, we've been running this through the Earth Explainer as to whether or not this has anything to do with food or resource gain and the EE said that 600 cows are needed each year to make that brown orb everyone is running after.

Alley: Yea, what are cows and where are they here if they need so many of them to make such a small orb. Like they must be pretty small to begin with. Well, here is someone. I think I will ask. Excuse me sir, excuse me.

Bystander: Yes.

Alley: Yes, I'm not exactly from these here parts, and I was wondering if you could explain to me the object of the game.

Bystander: What do ya mean?

Alley: I mean, well, first I mean, there must be some rules and things and what are those; and secondly, I mean, is there an overarching purpose to this activity. To put it another way, is there some sort of resource or food gain that I am simply not aware of or not seeing?

Bystander: (laughs) Yes, well, I can give you the answer to the first question. The second one is kind of what you are thinking. There is an overarching purpose, I suppose, but it is not readily detectable in the game or the players themselves.

Alley: Well, that is fine then. If you could give me the rules of the game first and maybe I can ask some questions that will help me better understand the second.

Bystander: Where did you say you were from?

Alley: I didn't.

Bystander: That is a pretty strange get up you have on, even for a football game. Okay, well, you will notice that the field is marked off by those hash marks up and down the field.

Alley: Is that those tag things I've been hearing so much about.

Bystander: Huh, no, I think you are talking about hashtags. That's something else. Those are hash marks and the distance between two of those marks represents a yard. A yard is a distance of measure.

Alley: A distance of measure right. Like a qualcom?

Bystander: Ah what?

Alley: Ah, oh never mind. Go ahead.

Bystander: So, you'll notice that ever five of those hash marks is a line that goes across the field and after every ten of those marks is a number.

Alley: And this is by design.

Bystander: Right. Now, what the team with the ball. . .

Alley: The ball, is that the orb shape that takes 600 cows to make?

Bystander: I'm sorry, six-hundred cows, what?

Alley: Oh, nothing. The orb is the ball and that is what is so important to the team possessing it?

Bystander: Well, no, not exactly. Both teams get equal time with the ball, at least at first, what they are trying to do is gain ten of those hash tags, I mean marks, and so they can keep going forward with the ball.

Alley: And the other team is trying to collect the same hash tags, marks, six-hundred or something?

Bystander: No, they are trying to stop the team from moving the ball forward. Because, and here's the key, they have four tries, or what are called "downs" to gain ten of those yards.

Alley: So the key to understanding this game is the idea that there are four "downs" and in these four downs or tries the team with the ball needs to gain ten hashes.

Bystander: Well, they need to move the ball the length of ten of those hash marks.

Alley: And when does that start?

Bystander: Oh look here, see, the team with the ball is about to start a play. You'll notice that they just decided on what the play is by getting together there and talking about it; and now they are coming up to the football and you'll notice that one man is putting his hands into another man's crotch.

Alley: Yes, I must say, I did notice that, but I wasn't going to say anything. But what you are saying is that putting one's hands onto another man's crotch is the beginning, on wait, he's backing up and yelling things. Is he mad at someone or somebody? Did someone commit more unnecessary roughness?

Bystander: Well, not exactly. Or yes, exactly, but he is trying to make it more necessary roughness by yelling those things. They are called signals to tell his own teammates some basic last minute or I guess last second instructions to his own team once he sees what the other team is doing. The signals are also telling the person now holding onto ball when to hike or throw it back to the other guy. There, see, it just happened.

(The play is a fake run and then an incomplete pass. There is some jawing near where Alley and the Bystander are standing.)

Alley: Ah, is it just me, or did basically nothing happen there. I mean it looks like he made a mistake by wanting one man to get the ball, but then pulling it back at the last second and then he threw it to someone who did not catch it.

Bystander: Yes, that is called not advancing the ball, and that is a bad thing. Remember now what the important thing is: to gain those ten hash marks or yards. Now they have one less "put hands in crotch" to do it or a "down."

Alley: And how does this gaining resources or secure food for the populace?

Bystander: Sorry, what?

Alley: How is this maintaining and improving basic life functions here?

Bystander: Huh, good question. I never quite thought of it that way. It's entertainment, I suppose, a game.

Alley: Are you saying that this has nothing to do with resource development and the gathering of substantive produce and products?

Bystander: Well, no I am not saying that. Boy, you really must be from another planet or something. In fact, it is kind of just the opposite. The players and teams you are watching are gathering more resources than most other people on the planet, but not directly. Oh wait, hold on, the team is about to run another play. You see those two people standing there on the sidelines holding sticks with flags on them?

Alley: It's a little hard to make them out, but yea, I see them. (Alley points the cam at the yardage markers so Homestead can see what Bystander is talking about.)

Bystander: Well, that is the distance that the ball needs to go in order for the team that has possession of the ball to continue possessing the ball and getting into the end zone.

Alley: End zone, is that like a place that has no end? It that what they mean when they say, “We were in the zone?”

Bystander: Huh, what, no. It is the end itself. Those two men holding the sticks with the markers are the means to that end. See those two big stick looking things sticking up in the sky at both ends of the field.

Alley: (Points the cam so Homestead can see them too). You mean those things that look like giant wishbones?

Bystander: Wishbones, right. Yea, I never thought of it quite like that. Well, they are called goal posts. (As the two are looking at the goal posts the football suddenly flies through them.)

Alley: Wait, what was that. I thought you said that the team needed to get the ball into the end zone. Did they just cheat or something?

Bystander: Well, not exactly. If the team with the ball doesn't make their ten yards in four downs, but they are close enough to the goal posts, then a kicker can try and kick the football between the two posts. It is not worth as many points, though.

Alley: Points, people are making points here?

Bystander: Points are those numbers on the board.

Alley: Numbers on a board, and a very large, fancy board I might add, is what is the important thing? Correct me if I'm wrong.

Bystander: Well, yes and no.

(To Be Continued. . .)

The End

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