

By Executive Order

Gary Juno was about to turn 30, and like every 30-year-old citizen, he was given a choice: join the Marines; get a job; or retire and become part of "the machine."

Last year, he tried the Marine Corps Preparation School – 6 months of hell that prepares men for the tough Marine Corps recruitment. He failed. He was informed that he didn't need to try the Army or Navy or Air Force – he just wasn't tough enough.

Every night on the news Gary watched horrifying stories of Marines fighting and dying out by Jupiter. An invasion of creatures called BEMs has been going on for 5 or 6 years now. After Marines train, they're shipped off to fight the BEMs, but they never seem to win. He'd been so excited about becoming a Marine – a freedom fighter for Earth! *Hoo-Ahh!*

He tried and tried to get a job, but jobs were as scarce as dinosaurs. After the Marine Prep school, Gary applied at a big grocery store for a stock clerk position, and he was 182nd in line. The news media reported that 12,300 people showed up for the job interview. When Gary got an email a few weeks later, he scored 1,018 out of 12,300 applicants. The news media reported that an unemployed college chemistry professor landed the job. His picture reminded Gary of Albert Einstein.

He's heard of political machines, and in school, he was taught about how they do a lot of good for society. He was taught about the "King of the Machine" – Chicago's former mayor, Richard Daley, and how he kept the huge city running well for many years because of "the machine."

But Gary mostly voted in the NeoGOP party for years, even though he hadn't tithed, like he was supposed to do. He doesn't feel like the Liberal Party is on the right track – how could they always be talking about giving so many benefits to people without raising taxes? Something just wasn't right, he supposed.

Gary thought about his options and decided to go ahead and switch to the Liberal Party, and retire in "the machine." If he did that, "the machine" would decide where he'd fit in, and what job he'd be assigned. At least he wouldn't be unemployed for the rest of his life. He was afraid that since he'd only had menial jobs, that he'd be stuck cleaning public toilets, or something even more degrading. He remembered when he worked for a traveling carnival, his job was to clean the animals down with a hose and scrub brush. An elephant almost crushed him when he applied the brush to the wrong part of the enraged animal's anatomy.

After a lot of thought, Gary met with the local Liberal Party Precinct Chairman, who was very smooth and professional – he was wearing a white summer suit, had an impressive tan, and sported gold chains and gold rings on most of his fingers. He showed Gary the forms to fill out and sign. Gary told him that he was afraid of what job he'd get, and the chairman just laughed. "Whatever you do in the machine during retirement, it will be just fine. Now sign here and you'll be on the right road."

Gary signed. The Precinct Chairman slapped his back and shook his hand. "Jim, come on over here and meet Gary – our newest Liberal Party member." Jim, who looked like a doctor, handed Gary a beverage, and the three men toasted.

Suddenly, Gary was lying on a table, with a needle in his arm – he felt stoned. He was not sure how he got to a hospital. He didn't read the lengthy paperwork that was handed to him, but he assumed that this was part of the new medical coverage that the TV commercials talked about all the time. Suddenly, mages of TV ads floated through his stoned mind: the pretty-boy ambulance-chasing lawyers, the

personal care products like catheters and adult diapers, the e-Cigarettes, and between most of the ads, the promising faces and voices of the Liberal Party, ensuring everyone that the president was doing her job, and the economy was doing well. Gary swooned and passed out cold.

Gary's mind was scanned and digitized and stored away in a segment of virtual memory in the Liberal Party's mainframe computer. Gary felt himself leaving his body behind. From the ceiling, he saw the gurney with his body being carted away – it was covered with a sheet. Gary passed up through the ceiling, and into a clear blue sky.

Within minutes, he started meeting people – clean, friendly, nice people. They patted him on the back and welcomed him to the machine. He tried to tell them that he didn't expect this outcome, but they all just chuckled at him. "You'll get used to it. Being part of the machine will make you very happy."

Pretty soon, an older gentleman came to him and gave him his work assignment. "Gary, you'll be a reporter for the *Liberal News*." Gary wondered why, and he was told that he'd taken a couple of college courses in English, and that right now he was the best qualified candidate for the position. Gary recalled dropping out of the community college in his second year. "What will I possibly write?"

"Don't worry, Gary. That will all be taken care of for you."

"What does that mean? Do you write the stories and I just publish them?"

"Yes, precisely. We can't have the news spinning out of control, you know."

Day after day, Gary showed up for work, read the story that he was supposed to publish, and then he keyed it into his computer terminal. When he was done, he felt like he'd accomplished something great and wonderful. After all, at least now he was working at a real job.

At night, he watched the video feed and saw the stories about the Marines getting killed by BEMs. He got upset to see such a waste of the countries' best and brightest, but, hey, he'd tried to go down that path and failed, and now he was pretty glad of that.

One day Gary met Irving, one of his buddies from the Marine Prep school. Irving stuck it out longer than Gary, but eventually, he failed too. They talked about the extreme physical training regimen and the 2,000 meter shooting range. They kidded about the constant running and how the sergeants were always so brutal with the students. Gary knew that Irving was brighter, faster and stronger, but he liked him anyway.

Gary and Irving were glad that they decided on retirement in the machine, and they're both sure that the fighting was best left to the rock-hard Marines who graduated Prep school. "Mens' men," they agreed. "Not like us," they joked.

One day Gary and Irving were talking about an article that Gary published about the president. He wrote a glowing report about her policies and commended her on her being the first president to truly fulfill the Liberal Party's agenda. Irving didn't like the article too much, and Gary tried to defend his writing, and finally admitted to Irving that he just copied whatever was placed in his in-basket.

Irving wasn't surprised at all, and he told Gary that he did similar things for the city school board – he made sure that the library books that were on a certain list were always checked out. He ran around town all day, checking out the books so that students wouldn't be misled by bad information. They both agreed that there were dangerous ideas that kids shouldn't be exposed to, and it was part of society's role to control ideas – for the good of all.

One day, Gary and Irving wondered what happened to their other friends from Marine Prep school. They tracked a few of them down, and found out that they'd all been sent to fight BEMs, and they all died. Now the two friends were really glad that they failed.

The friends discussed politics, but only when they were alone – the local Ward Alderman reminded them both that it's unnecessary to discuss politics without a trained political representative present, since all decisions are made by Executive Order. "All you two need to do is to nod your heads and smile – is that perfectly clear?"

One day the police picked up the local habitual drunk. He'd been told time after time not to argue about the president's decisions, but he kept telling everyone in the local bar that she should have done this or that differently. Irving told Gary that the guy would be taken to the Marine Corps and he'd be drafted. "Poor boob will wind up fighting the BEMs, and probably dying, too." The friends silently agreed that life was good, they were enjoying their jobs, and that they wouldn't do something as stupid as the old drunk.

One day, Gary asked Irving to explain what the Ward Alderman told them about Executive Orders. "Don't we have a Congress or Parliament, or something? Does the president make all the decisions for the country?"

"Sure – ever since she's been in office. Our representatives have been at each other's throats for decades, so she just does what she wants by Executive Order. After all, nobody wants to appear to hate Black women, so they just let her do whatever she wants. She's really not so bad, compared to some of the jerks we've had in the past." They both laughed and agreed.

The nightly news about dead Marines wore Gary out. He couldn't believe that so many brave men were fighting and dying for freedom from BEMs.

One night, Irving piped up "Don't you know that that's all a crock? There're no BEMs – the president cooked that story up so that she could get rid of aggressive males."

Gary is stunned! "What?? You can't possibly know that, Irving. You're treading on very dangerous ground."

"I know, but I was a computer programmer before I tried Marine Prep school, and finally became part of this machine. I've figured it all out: we're inside of a mainframe computer, Gary. I thought you knew that. We've been digitized and stored, and we're subroutines in a huge computer simulation of our country."

Gary was floored – he'd suspected it for a long time, but this was confirmation. "You're crazy! Are you saying that this like the *Matrix*?"

"Not really. We're allowed to run as independent subroutines – that's what makes us feel alive. Every time the computer's clock ticks, we're activated for a short time, then we go back to sleep – we're inactivated."

Gary was at a loss for words. He'd never understood about computers – he'd never even tried. "Can computers really do that? Make us live, even though we're dead?"

Irving explained how computer multi-tasking worked, and how Gary's physical body was cremated after he joined the Liberal machine. Gary remembered viewing his own death and gasped.

"So what's the deal with BEMs, and the Marines that are being slaughtered every day?"

"They're no more real than you and I, Gary. The president set up special virtual cells in the computer where Marines fight simulated aliens and then die. Her main job, as head of the Liberal Party, is to get rid of aggressive males, and that's how she does it."

"Are you insane? How do you know that?"

"I looked up the Liberal Party Platform Rules in the database. You can access them through the terminal in the Main Library. It's their platform – what they believe in; it's what they promise to do if elected."

"So there's no BEMs or Marines being slaughtered?"

"Nope. Look, man, we were already clinically dead when we joined the machine. How hard do you think it is to issue an Executive Order to terminate the most aggressive males who exist only in a data base? And that's what being a Marine is all about – remember the guys in Prep School who did push-ups for 8 straight hours? That's what the Liberals want to get rid of, and candy-coating it by telling people about how patriotic they are – fighting BEMs and dying for our country. makes it easier for ordinary people to support, that's all. The Liberals can't stand the idea of aggressive men shooting rifles 2,000 yards – it drives them mad."

"So that's why we've never actually seen those BEMs on the nightly news?"

"Right, Gary-o...BEM is an old sci-fi term for bug-eyed monster. Obviously there ain't no such thing."

"But...But..."

"Enjoy it while it lasts, Gary, my boy – this fall's election may bring the NewGOP back into power, so we'll be terminated, one by one. By Executive Order, of course – nice and legal, right?"

"I don't understand why we're in a computer? Wouldn't it be easier to just let us die and be buried?"

"Simple, Gary: it improves "the numbers," so it gives one party or the other some advantage before elections. Remember: in here, by Executive Order, we vote. If we were dead, then we couldn't. Think about all that crap you yourself publish on how great the economy is, and how low the unemployment rate is. How did you think that happened? Were you ever able to get a real job in the last 30 years of your life? Dead people vote, but don't consume any food, clothing or shelter. The economy never gets worse when a certain percentage of the population disappears every day."

"That makes sense. So both political parties are really the same – we're just being exploited as votes for one side or the other? Say goodnight, Irving."

"You said it, I didn't. In the machine, we live and die by Executive Order – and only our vote counts. Good night, Gary."

A few days later, after a routine scan by the Auditing Subprogram, Irving and Gary's subroutines were isolated, charged with treason and sedition, and, by Executive Order number 1,223,048, dated 04 JUL 2114, they were drafted into the United States Marine Corps, transferred to the Jupiter Partition, and immediately removed from the operating system task queue.

That night, between commercials, the news report included "Our hearts go out to the 224 brave Marines who died today, fighting BEMs near Jupiter; and after the break, Judy with the weather."