

## The Book of Ralph

**Christopher Steinsvold**

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Christopher Steinsvold merges science fiction and social satire in this quirky and highly entertaining look at first contact in the not-too-distant future. When Earth looks up one night and sees, "Coca-Cola" scrolled across the full moon in bright red letters, that company is immediately suspected of polluting the view. The accusations are proved groundless, and just as the matter is starting to fade from the public mind, a giant Campbell's soup can appears over the White House, then lands gracefully on the lawn. Inside is Ralph, an endearing alien with a soft spot for humanity and a dire warning which he insists on delivering to the president in person: in two days, Earth will be invaded by forces from the evil planet Kardash. Resistance is futile, and the only choices are annihilation or joining the aliens in their destruction. The book is as much commentary on contemporary society as it is apocalyptic science-fiction.

Ralph, well-versed in American culture, emerges from his soup-can capsule to the Rocky theme song, fist pumping, waving a gigantic American flag, and wearing a NASCAR suit studded with brand names and logos. Despite the threat of imminent extinction, humans remain true to type. Crowds groove on Ralph as an ubercelebrity. Inside the White House, advisors scramble to preserve their own sinecures while storm clouds gather, wonder what trick of language will allow them to avoid saying "Kardashian invasion," and, never letting a crisis go to waste, seize the opportunity to have sex in the Lincoln Bedroom. The writing is crisp, the observing eye is keen, and the bittersweet ending is simultaneously cinematic, sentimental, and thought-provoking.

SUSAN WAGONER (Fall 2016)

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