

## **Aliens Will Start WW3**

Kourtney Kardashian, on principle, has never said anything relatable in her life. As a reality TV starlet, wellness gummy entrepreneur and Hollywood it girl, there is little need to. So imagine my shock, when mid-reality TV marathon, Kardashian divulged “I never read the news. It gives me bad vibes.”

A statement which, at its very essence, encompasses the current mood of Australian society. Our news cycle has become suffocating in its severity, to the extent that Australian readers are either desensitised or avoiding the news entirely.

You can't open the paper without visibly recoiling, a sickening feeling in your stomach as you read about the hostages in Gaza or the fallen soldiers of Ukraine.

Over this past year, I've found myself checking out from the news, and instead investing my mental energy in Keeping up with the Kardashians. The saga of picking Gucci over Chanel is easy to follow, but the wars raging across the globe – they're impossible to understand.

How could humans, the same people who burn their lip whilst drinking their morning cup of tea, do such things? How on earth does Putin look at himself in the mirror? How do people storm kibbutz's, hold hostages, commit genocide?

It's unfathomable.

And entirely unreadable. Because the core of any good story is empathy. That bond that we create between ourselves and another being that we see, essentially, as sharing our same humanity. Cinderella is just another girl. Bluey, is just another kid. Oppenheimer is just another man. We can empathise and engage with these characters because we see ourselves in them.

And it is in this fundamental truth: that humans emotionally connect with people who they deem to be like them, that the cause of Kardashian concern was born. Because all of these tragedies that circulate on our news cycle are caused by one thing: aliens.

Not ET, or Spok, but the aliens that Orwell wrote about in his essays on antisemitism. As Orwell saw it, an alien isn't necessarily green, or adorned with antennae: it is simply a being that is not like us. Someone who is categorized as intrinsically other. Once you view someone as alien, Orwell theorised you could justify any cruelty towards them. Because, once someone isn't like you, it isn't that big of a leap to think that they aren't as human as you.

This mindset of alienation squashes curiosity, instead encouraging judgment. Judgment creates ignorance which allows for the mongering of hatred, the building of stereotypes, the degradation of a people until their identities are simplified to the word them, contrasted by us.

But the thing with alienating others is that in doing so, we negate any ability we had to actively learn about them. Alienating people is like pushing them into a really dark corner, but humans are afraid of the dark. We don't like what we don't know, and worse than that, we demonise it. And so, once a group is alienated, conflict arises and soon the news becomes unreadable.

That's when children are held as hostages because of their nationality. That's when countries are invaded with the sole ethos that they are not the nation from which you come. That is when we

see thousands of men, women and children: humans in their very essence, not alien at all, dead. Aliens start wars. You can see it in Nazi Germany, in the Rwandan Genocide, in the Apartheid: alienation is an archaic easy-bake recipe for heinous evil.

As Martin Luther King wrote, "Alienation is a form of living death. It is the acid of despair that dissolves society." When the bonds of empathy that bind us to each living being dissolve, that is when our society begins to crumble, and our very perception of what is right and wrong is ruptured.

And so, in her effervescent wisdom, Kourtney Kardashian was onto something. The news is, in short, very bad vibes.

Because, yes: the news shows us tragedy caused by alienation, and to be honest, that is a bad vibe. But the worst vibe is that this breakdown of empathy, and lack of curiosity, is reflected in me. And you. Us news readers. Because when we inevitably click away from a heavy article to avoid the bad vibes – we stop hearing stories about people who aren't like us.

We stop hearing about the Ukrainian grandmother Maria Nikolaevna who emerged from her bomb shelter with her three granddaughters to find their parents dead on the street outside their family home. We stop hearing about the child patients of a bombed Palestinian hospital holding a press conference in the waiting room, quite simply pleading "to live as other children live". We stop hearing stories, and stories have the power to transform aliens into living breathing humans.

Look, I struggled to read these articles and even talking about them is hard. But if we allow ourselves to turn away, we prevent these stories from being told. We dismantle the opportunity we have, in this digital world, to build bonds of empathy between people separated by oceans and races and wars through stories that will break your heart, but that will make you care.

So if you don't care read the news, you'll start to see aliens everywhere. It takes so little to view someone as other, to think that their circumstance could never be your own. And whilst that may seem relatively harmless, if we allow our society to foster apathy towards the human story because it's sad, or scary, or depressing: we're making the very issue we deem to be "bad vibes" worse.

Our emotional disconnect allows for the manufacturing of aliens, and aliens have caused every war that has occurred on this planet. So, read the news. Join the war against alienation. But, have a plan. Don't go running onto the battlefield in some righteous quest for glory.

It won't end well.

Set boundaries. Making yourself feel horrible because someone else feels horrible solves nothing. As someone who really struggles with anxiety, it's super easy to weaponize the news against yourself. So please, be kind to yourself, and prioritise engaging with people's stories genuinely, over making yourself feel awful.

Make an effort to understand cultures at their root, not just at their lowest moment. Read memoirs, read epics, read poetry, engage with any content you can get your hands on from cultures you wouldn't otherwise connect with.

The best way to understand a nation's reality is to understand their fantasies. Read up on Indian, Chinese, Arabian folk tales. Learn about the stories upon which nations' identities were built, the

morals by which their people live and work: not the burning buildings they stand in front on the worst days of their lives.

Understanding people beyond the labels you assign them is so important. Whether that's victim or villain, it's counterproductive.

You can use these skills in your daily life as well, changing how you view your own story. The labels you assign to the people you dodge eye contact with or cross the street to avoid. Empathy isn't just something to condemn politicians for not having. It's something to actively cultivate within your daily life.

You can't expect yourself to engage with the news in a healthy and meaningful way without training. Read those stories. Make that eye contact.

In a digital age, knowledge is at our fingertips and the ability to learn isn't just a right, it's a responsibility. But a super cool one.

The stories on the news that have made me feel helpless and suffocated – to the extent I can now recite entire episodes of Keeping Up with the Kardashians— those same stories can empower you.

You have the ability to fight alienation. What could be a better vibe than that?