

# Minions and Pundits

by Bill Herbst

*Version 1.4 (posted on 10 March 2020)  
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*Minion: a servile dependent, follower, or underling; a yes-man or sycophant.*

*Pundit: an expert in a particular subject or field who is frequently called on to give opinions about it to the public; in modern media, someone who pontificates with pretensions of authority about current events.*

We have become a nation of minions and pundits. Perhaps we always were, but we sure as hell are now.

Minions carry out the work of their masters or bosses, praising them effusively the whole time. Minions never challenge the wisdom or valid authority of those above them within the hierarchy in which they toil. They are eagerly obedient.

Look at the Trump administration (or the Democratic Party establishment, for that matter). Minions almost exclusively. Lots of them. They fill the ranks of the professional political class, parroting the approved narratives without a shred of apparent doubt. Good, dutiful soldiers all.

Now turn your attention to the public, specifically to voters. Watch any of the 30-second interviews with voters, usually in primary or caucus states, that are ritually aired in the mainstream media. What do you see? Punditry. You may hear voters talk momentarily about the issues that concern them personally — health care, the economy and jobs, climate change, whatever — and the candidates whose views resonate with their concerns, but almost invariably (and especially among Democratic voters) the brief interview morphs quickly into their assessment of who they think other people will vote for.

Trump supporters tend overwhelmingly to behave as minions. Trump is their guy, he's doing a great job, etc. Trump detractors (i.e., Democrats) tend, less overwhelmingly but still significantly, to behave as pundits. Who can beat Trump? That's their number one passion. Issues — healthcare, wealth inequality, climate change — may matter, but those all line up behind the almost painful longing for a return to the way things were. These voters cast their ballots based on whoever they feel has the best chance to restore some semblance of normalcy to America by ridding us of the Trumpian wrecking-ball.

Republicans (i.e., Trump's minions) are now like lemmings to the sea, perfectly willing to follow other lemmings right over the cliff. They are completely secure in their delusions of Trump's greatness. Meanwhile, Democrats (i.e., voter-pundits) are terrified of backing and selecting the wrong candidate. Oh my God! What if we pick someone who can't beat Trump? They are Nervous Nellies, anxiety-ridden and wracked by angst.

Were all this not so tragic, it would be comic. As things are, it's pathetic. I try as best I can to apply the discipline of universal compassion, to understand just how human and accept how inevitable each of these roles are. I'm only partially successful, however. Something inside me rejects both as hopelessly lost.

I don't interact with any Trump minions. I don't work with them or even talk to them. Please understand, I don't hate them, and I won't do anything to harm these people, but I regard all Trump minions as hypnotized at best, and walking dead zombies at worst.

So, the rest of this commentary will be devoted to Democratic voter-pundits.

William Goldman was a noted American novelist and a Hollywood screenwriter. He penned the scripts for "*Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*" and "*All the President's Men*," winning well-deserved Oscars for both films. He also wrote the novels *Marathon Man* and *The Princess Bride*, both of which he later adapted for the screen in the movie versions that followed. Goldman died in 2018 at the ripe old age of 87.

Along the way of his long career, he wrote many books, including a non-fiction memoir in 1983 entitled *Adventures in the Screen Trade*, about his career in Hollywood movies, which I read soon after its publication. In that book, Goldman famously delivered one of the best, most punchy lines ever written about the movie business: "*Nobody knows anything.*" The statement referred to Goldman's opinion (based on much experience) that no one in Hollywood — not writers, not actors, not directors, not studio heads, nor anyone else associated with the movie biz — can ever accurately predict which film projects will result in movies that succeed financially and/or are great artistically. Some green-lit projects that look terrific on paper fail miserably, despite having big stars, good writers, great directors, and ample funding. Others, such as the movie "Rocky" (to name one obvious example) are given no chance at all before or even during production, but defy the odds to become box office hits that rake in a ton of money and critical praise, cementing their place in the mythic pantheon of Tinsel Town.

The context for Goldman's statement was his advice to aspiring screenwriters and filmmakers, which he hammered home throughout the memoir, *not* to pander to the prevailing winds of opinion or the traditional wisdom among Hollywood insiders, but rather to write, produce, and create whatever mattered most to themselves, at least insofar as that's possible in an industry based on

money. Better to take a shot and possibly fail than to sell out in the hope of success.

And so it is from the Democratic side of the American political duopoly with all the punditry surrounding the 2020 Presidential election, whether from professional political operatives and consultants of the chattering, talking-heads variety now ubiquitous in the mainstream media, or from the voters themselves:

*"Nobody knows anything."*

Who can beat Trump? That is the mantra of the liberal and moderate voters-turned-pundits. *No one knows*. Who might make a halfway decent President? *No one knows*. Can any politician fix America and save us from ourselves? *No one knows*.

Now that everyone but Bernie and Biden have dropped out of the race, it appears that the both the Democratic Party establishment (including the centrist mainstream corporate media) and the voters (particularly black voters, who are still in thrall to the myth of the Great God Barack Obama) have coalesced behind Uncle Joe. Bernie (who is actually quite moderate politically and could be considered "radical" or "revolutionary" only in a country as far right as America) has had his day in the sun — twice, first in 2016 and now again this year — but his star is fading. Although Sanders will command a significant percentage of delegates to the Democratic Convention, the handwriting is already on the wall. I won't go quite so far as to say that the fix is in, but the die appears to be cast. Barring any unforeseen traumas, Biden will be nominated by the Dems to go up against the Trumpster and his Minions in November.

Will that work out well? No one knows.

From an astrological perspective, Biden's chart is entering a period of Dream Time for the rest of the year (Neptune passing over his Lower Heaven, a once-a-lifetime event that half of us never get. This could mean either a lovely fantasy or a horrible nightmare for Joe. Biden is vulnerable, and his physical vitality may or may not be up to snuff. He is visibly frail and may be suffering from dementia, but he's the Democratic standard-bearer now for compassion and kindness. That could play out either way, toward inspiration of the public or his own personal martyrdom. Can Biden stand up to Trump? That's a little like an autistic paraplegic in a wheelchair going up against a noxious schoolyard bully and his gang of thugs. Shades of *"A Clockwork Orange."*

Trump's chart is in Total Meltdown mode, with transiting Pluto, Saturn, and Jupiter all opposing his natal Saturn and Venus, an extraordinary and harsh alignment culminating this year and next that (to put it mildly) does not bode well for continued success. Were Trump even remotely close to being a normal human, we might make a case for at least some positive meanings emerging

from those killer transits. If he were merely the criminal real estate mogul and small-time Mafioso of his earlier life, we might hope for the possibility of reform from his narcissism and venality. But we are past that. Americans have given license to Donald Trump's full, unrestrained egomania, his delusions of grandeur. We are already paying a steep price for that, and the butcher's bill could get much worse.

Trump may win or lose the election (and in the event of the latter he just might refuse to leave office), but — whatever happens — his time in the limelight is almost over. One way or another, Donald Trump's yacht is sailing into very rough seas. The most vexing concern is who he will take down with him. His family? Some of his minions? All of us?

I have a high degree of confidence in the astrology here, but I don't pretend to know the manifestations and events that will shape how all this plays out for these two old men or for the rest of us.

*"Nobody knows anything."*

Not really, and sometimes not at all. Sure, we do the best we can — wrapped as we are in ignorance and so deeply inclined toward self-deception. I wish we were further along toward some version of more graceful collective maturity, but we are where we are.