

A MEETING OF TWO WORLDS

ALIEN ALLIES IN THE WAR ON TERROR

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1.

George Abooli walked through the entrance of the Cosmic Café and felt like he had stepped into a scene from a sci-fi movie. Pictures of outer space, different kinds of spacecraft, and imaginary space heroes decorated the walls of the restaurant, while twinkling stars of all sizes and planets scattered about on a black-colored ceiling gave the appearance of being in a planetarium. The sound of ambient music drifted from overhead speakers, as George sat on a bench by the entrance, waiting for his girlfriend, Allison Bardwell.

He waited impatiently, his stomach growling with hunger, and nervously looked at his watch. *Allison's running late.* George thought. *She was supposed to meet me here at noon and it's already 12:15.*

One minute later, the door opened, and a casually-dressed medium-figured woman entered and came up to him. Long auburn hair flowed down the sides of her face, and a youthful complexion made her appear younger than her 33 years of age.

George, a slender handsome man, stood at nearly six feet, and although he was pushing forty, appeared younger. His short, dark brown hair, neatly brushed and parted on the right side, showed minimal gray at the temples. He rose and gave her a hug, feeling the laptop computer she held in her arms press against his body.

"Allison –"

"Sorry I'm late," she said apologetically before George could finish his sentence. "It took longer than expected to get my errands done."

A hostess seated them in a booth. Allison checked out the menu while George, knowing what he wanted, didn't take one.

"Galaxy Burger again?" she asked as she pored over the restaurant's selections.

"You got me pegged – it's my standard fare here," he answered.

Allison stared at him and raised her eyebrows teasingly. "Ever feel like daring to venture into something different? I'm splurging today – Planetary Pasta with a Big Dipper Salad and a Supernova Sundae for dessert."

"Exploring outer space, yes. Trying something other than my favorite menu item, no," George replied seriously.

A server took their orders, and then Allison placed her laptop on the table. She grinned and playfully raised her eyebrows like a young girl asking her daddy for something. "Mind if I download pictures of the meteor shower right now?"

"Not at all." George reached into a side pocket of his tan corduroy sport jacket. "Camera's right here. You missed a good show."

"You must have been up late last night."

"Up 'til 3 AM," George said with a yawn. "It was worth it. The skies over Albuquerque were pretty clear and I got some great shots."

Allison booted up her computer while George attached a cable from his camera. A series of photos downloaded and displayed on the monitor.

"Fantastic!" Allison exclaimed as she eyed the pictures of the Perseid meteor shower. "Can't wait to show these to the students in my high school science class when school starts." She nodded her head several times. "George, you're a damn good amateur

astronomer.”

“Thanks,” he said humbly.

A photograph of an unusually bright green meteor caught Allison’s attention. She approached for a closer look and froze for a moment. “Oh my gosh – a flying saucer!”

George took a close look and shook his head. “Pattern recognition,” he replied calmly. “It looks like a flying saucer, but it’s only a meteor shaped in a way that lends itself to interpretation. That’s like seeing different shapes in the clouds.”

“I think it’s an alien spaceship!” she asserted in a raised voice.

He took a deep breath. “Extremely unlikely.”

“The presence of extraterrestrial beings is very likely,” Allison insisted, jerking her head and flipping her hair back. “You know that organic compounds are present throughout the universe. Given the proper conditions anywhere, life will arise and evolve.”

George was aware that well over 200 planets had been discovered outside of the Solar System, some of them similar to Earth, with more being discovered all the time. And there were plenty of avid space enthusiasts like Allison who believed that when considering the vastness of the universe with its billions of galaxies, each one with billions of stars, intelligent life was bound to arise somewhere besides here. But he wasn’t convinced.

“That’s true,” he acknowledged, “but after decades of listening with our radio telescopes and increasing the sensitivity of our means of detection by several orders of magnitude, we have yet to receive a definitive signal from an intelligent alien civilization. The results have been discouraging.” George let out a sigh. “I no longer think ET’s are out there.”

“Maybe you don’t want ET’s to be out there,” Allison snapped. “It goes against your personal beliefs about humanity.”

“I wanted to believe that aliens exist,” George responded with a frown, “but now I believe humans have a special place in the universe. As many religions put it, they are a special creation of God and have a unique relationship with him. He has a plan for them. If aliens were to enter the picture, that would disrupt things.”

“However, creating a vast universe with intelligent beings on only one planet would be absurd. Like building a gigantic condo complex with the intention of having only one unit occupied.”

George thought about that for a moment, and then answered, “Maybe the intention was for the occupants of the one unit to reproduce and move out into the other units.”

“You mean it could be our destiny to explore outer space and eventually populate the entire galaxy,” Allison said, intrigued.

“Provided we don’t destroy ourselves. If we really are alone, it behooves us to do whatever it takes to ensure our future survival.”

George felt he was getting the upper hand in this friendly debate. Allison remained silent, listening intently.

“Furthermore,” he continued, “if humans were not alone in the universe, they wouldn’t be special and ensuring their survival wouldn’t have as much meaning. There are important implications here.”

“Well, my philosopher friend, that’s an interesting question for you.”

“Yes, it comes up in my classes from time to time, but I always end up saying we’re

most likely alone because of the absence of evidence.”

“That doesn’t necessarily mean the evidence of absence,” Allison countered.

“But I still think we’re alone in the universe,” George said, refusing to yield to Allison’s smart comeback. “That’s just as well because humanity doesn’t need to be distracted by the presence of extraterrestrial beings. There are plenty of problems on Earth that need our attention.”

The server placed their meals in front of them as the conversation continued.

“I know,” Allison said, grimacing. “A war in Iraq, terrorism, pollution, dwindling resources, rising oil prices, economic woes, a messed-up healthcare system, poverty, and high crime rates. Life’s so stressful these days.”

“That’s what I’m talking about,” George said, becoming passionate and gesturing with his hands while he spoke. “Pressing issues, more important than worrying about aliens. I’m concerned about our future survival and need to propose some solutions to ensure it.”

“I liked what you said in your letters to the editor and magazine articles. Ever consider becoming a political activist or running for office?”

“Never. I want nothing to do with politics. Politicians are corrupt,” George stated adamantly. “I’ll stick to formulating ideas and let my students use them to bring about change.”

Several months passed and the holiday season arrived. For Thanksgiving, George brought Allison to visit his best friend, Martin Pankin and his wife, Terri. George and Martin conversed in front of a fireplace, where the aroma from a burning, crackling log wafted through the living room. Allison spent her time in the kitchen with Martin’s wife, who was preparing dinner, and was known for being a great cook. Judging from the blend of aromas coming from the kitchen this meal would be a king’s feast.

When she finished, Terri came to the living room and made an announcement with a slight southern drawl. “Hey, y’all, dinner’s ready.”

An attractive woman in her early thirties, Terri had a Barbie doll figure and thick, short blonde hair that perfectly framed her sapphire blue eyes. By contrast, Martin was ten years older, had a little paunch, shoulder-length black hair speckled with gray, and dark brown eyes.

Everyone sat at the dining room table and opened by exchanging a few words of gratitude, followed by a friendly conversation while they ate.

Martin looked at George and asked, “How are your class discussions on the world’s problems going?”

“Well for the most part,” George replied as he took a bite of turkey with cranberry sauce. “We come up with some provocative concepts, but it’s a matter of getting them implemented.”

“Yeah, man. Ideas need to be put into action. But you’re a thinker and a dreamer, not an activist.”

“That’s why I’m a philosophy professor.”

The phone rang, and Martin left the table to answer it.

“Hi, Uncle Martin.”

“Charles. What’s up?”

“Turn on CNN right now. Something interesting in the news.”

“Will do. Thanks.”

Martin went to the living room and grabbed the TV remote control. He pressed the buttons to get CNN and arrived in the middle of a news report.

“... Aricebo Radio Observatory in Puerto Rico. The signal came from the direction of the star, Tau Ceti. Scientists are trying to confirm the signal ...”

“Interesting!” Allison remarked. “Tau Ceti is similar to the Sun, and it’s only twelve light years away – a relatively close galactic neighbor. Maybe it has an inhabited Earth-like planet.”

“Welcome, ET!” Martin announced with a touch of humor.

“But the signal’s unconfirmed,” George objected. “Unless it’s confirmed, it’s most likely an anomaly.”

Two days later, at George’s place, Allison sat with him on the living room sofa, watching the evening news.

“Scientists conclude that the mysterious signal recently received by the Arecibo Radio Observatory is not of alien origin ...”

“Aw, too bad,” Allison muttered.

George smirked and shook his head. “There are no intelligent beings out there.”

“Don’t be so pessimistic.”

The news reporter went on to other news stories:

“In Baghdad today, new up-and-coming government official, Ibn Malek Habibi initiated talks between sectarian groups. He’s also becoming involved with improving Iraq’s capability of handling the violence. As reported, the charismatic Habibi is gaining respect throughout the country. Bringing differing factions to the negotiating table is an accomplishment in itself ...”

“Let’s hope Habibi can get them to reach an agreement,” Allison said.

George nodded as he lifted a cup of green tea and took a swig. “The war has dragged on for so long. Iraq needs strong leadership and a strong security force to restore and maintain order on its own, without the help of the Americans.”

“The American troop surge has helped reduce violence, but the troops can’t stay there forever.”

“It could be a long time before the Iraqis are able to handle things on their own,” George said as he put his cup down on the coffee table.

Allison arched her eyebrows. “I know. I wish aliens would come to help us end terrorism and bring peace to the Middle East.”

“Alien allies in the War on Terror?” George said, laughing. “You have a vivid imagination.”

Allison went over to the living room window and looked out. “Let’s get our minds off of the depressing news and go for a walk.” She then grabbed George by the arm and whispered, “It’s a beautiful cool night with a full moon.”

“Umm, okay.”

The two put on their jackets and stepped outside. The Moon illuminated the bare branches of a cottonwood tree in the front yard, and a few Christmas lights could already be seen throughout the neighborhood. The chill in the air tingled, but the lack of wind made it tolerable as they walked holding hands.

At the end of the block, George stopped and slid his arm around Allison’s waist. He

gazed at the moonbeams casting a soft glow on her face.

“Want to know something, my Star Lady?”

“What, my Star Man?” she replied as she drew closer to him.

“You look beautiful in the moonlight.”

Their lips met in a tender kiss.

Suddenly, a bright greenish light sliced across the sky in a northerly direction.

“Look at that meteor!” George exclaimed, looking up and pointing toward it.

Allison stared. “That’s strange ... moving slower than a typical meteor.”

One week before Christmas, a UFO sighting was reported near Winnipeg, Manitoba in Canada. But it was dismissed. Then another sighting occurred three days later outside Fargo, North Dakota, and on the following day a strange airborne object was seen to the west of Des Moines, Iowa. Two days before Christmas, there was yet another sighting near Topeka, Kansas. While this attracted more attention, skeptics attributed it to mass hysteria and the copycat phenomenon inspired by the first sighting. Furthermore, nothing had been picked up on radar.

Allison arrived at George’s place on Christmas Eve to spend the holiday. George greeted her with a kiss at his front door.

“What do you make of the recent UFO sightings?” she asked as they walked inside.

“I’m not sure,” George replied with a puzzled look on his face. “They can probably be explained away, but I’m intrigued by their frequency of occurrence. Weird.”

“Have an open mind.” Allison smiled. “Could be ET’s are trying to contact us.”

“I’d like to believe that, but –”

“I know. Lack of hard evidence.”

George paused for a long breath. “That’s what bothers me, Allison. If someone is really out there, we should have detected something definitive by now with all the searching we’ve done.”

“There’s lots of ground to cover, and we may not be listening at the right frequencies. ET’s are most likely using a form of communication foreign to us.”

“That’s true,” George conceded. His mind opened up for a moment as he thought, *What if aliens are really trying to contact us, but we haven’t tuned in to the right station? Nah. That still doesn’t mean they’re out there.*

“Furthermore,” Allison pressed on, “if any of the UFO reports throughout history are correct, then maybe aliens have already been here.”

He grimaced. “Those reports can be explained by something else.”

“That’s what you always say. Well, let’s suppose an alien spaceship landed here. Now suppose you encountered the aliens and they invited you to visit their home planet. Would you go? I would.”

George’s eyebrows went up. “If that really happened, I’d jump at the chance.”

Christmas came and went with no further sightings. A few days later, Allison took advantage of the holiday break from school and visited relatives out of town. George sat alone in his living room, watching the evening news while tolerating a microwave frozen dinner.

“In Iraq, Habibi makes progress with negotiations,” said a news reporter. “His popularity is growing as he takes on more responsibility in the government and assists

Prime Minister Fadwad Dalaki. Can he bring stability? Habibi also continues working with the Americans to strengthen the Iraqi army. That effort has been successful, as sectarian violence continues to drop. If the present trend continues, withdrawal of American troops might be considered next year ...

“In other news, a dreary economic outlook for 2008. Analysts forecast a recession in the face of rising oil prices, expected to go well over 100 dollars per barrel in the months to come. This is thought to be fueled by increased demand not only from the United States, but also from the booming economies of China and India. Tensions in the Middle East contribute as well. Some analysts predict gasoline at four dollars per gallon by next summer ...”

Doesn't sound good, George mused. Rising oil prices will have a ripple effect on every aspect of the economy, especially since we're so dependent on oil. The price on everything will go up. People will drive less, which may not be all bad, but they'll spend less which will hurt businesses. As businesses suffer, more people will lose their jobs, which will lead to even less spending, thus creating a vicious cycle. Looks like tough times ahead.

The news reporter continued:

“More strange objects in the sky. Are we being visited by aliens? More on the latest in the recent rash of UFO sightings coming up next.”

Got to hear about that, George thought, his curiosity aroused. He took off for the kitchen to grab a cup of hot tea and returned to the living room sofa.

After the commercial break, the reporter continued:

“Breaking news! UFO sighted over western Texas near Abilene moments ago! A flood of people reported seeing a greenish light hovering, then maneuvering in a way no known aircraft was capable of, and finally disappearing. A blip on the radar screens at Dyess Air Force base in Abilene sent fighter jets scrambling. But once airborne, they found nothing and returned to base.”

The reporter paused for a moment. “This just in. Air Force officials are dismissing the radar blip as either an equipment malfunction or space debris.”

“Still nothing conclusive,” George muttered to himself.

New Year's Eve, George and Allison had dinner at her place and brought in 2008 quietly. He stayed overnight and on New Year's Day, they watched a sci-fi DVD, ate popcorn, and shared classroom experiences.

Allison turned toward him and grasped his hand. “George?”

“Yes?”

“We've known one another for over six months, and I think we have a pretty committed relationship. Don't you?”

Placing her hand to his lips, he replied, “I do.”

“Time to take it to the next level,” Allison stated nervously. “You know ... move in together.”

“Yes!” George exclaimed, feeling a wave of delight.

Allison jumped for joy.

“Let's do it!” George continued, still excited. He calmed down and then said, “After I return from the conference, we'll look for a new house together.”

“Sounds like a plan, my Star Man.” She gave him a big hug.

George drove to Las Cruces, New Mexico on Thursday, January 3 to attend a conference and checked into his hotel that evening. The meeting ran from Friday until early Sunday afternoon. He talked with Allison every day on the phone, and after a late lunch on Sunday, he called to tell her he was about to get on the road and would call again when he got home. Then she would come over.

It was already dark when George passed by Socorro, heading north on Interstate 25 back to Albuquerque in his Toyota Camry. He saw mile marker 150 and knew he had approximately 75 miles to go.

Twenty minutes later on a darkened stretch of road, George noticed the spectacular, star-studded night sky. One star directly in front of him appeared brighter than the others and was greenish in color. It grew larger and brighter as he continued driving. Then it appeared to be moving. *Just an airplane*, he thought. But then the green light made strange maneuvers that no aircraft was capable of and changed colors to a brilliant white, followed by a rich red, ending in golden yellow.

George could hardly contain his thoughts. *That's no airplane. What the hell is it? A balloon? Some atmospheric phenomenon? An alien spaceship? Nah, couldn't be. Probably just an illusion. But I'll keep watching it.*

The mysterious light moved to the north, although not rapidly as if to allow George to close in on it. After a few miles, it headed in a more westerly direction. *Uh-oh. It's moving away from the Interstate. Better find an exit so I don't lose it. Got to find out what it is.*

George came to Exit 175 and turned off onto Old Highway 85, heading southwest, while the object moved to the west-northwest. *I'm going too far south. Better find another side road.* A mile and a half further, he got lucky and made a right turn onto graveled County Road 12. He was now moving toward the light, and also toward Ladron Peak, which could not be seen in the dark. The mysterious object slowed and descended gradually to a gentle landing in the distance, near the foot of the mountain. As it did, the light faded and became difficult to see.

A strange feeling came over George as he drove down that dark, lonely road through the middle of nowhere, with only the beams of his car's headlights in front of him. He kept glancing off to either side, hoping to find something. After a few miles, he saw a faintly-glowing object on the ground approximately one hundred yards from the road. George parked his car and opened up his cell phone, dialing his girlfriend's number. *Got to tell Allison about this.* He only got static and was unable to get through. *Damn. Must be some kind of interference from whatever it is out there.* He flipped his cell phone shut, got out of the car, and cautiously approached the mysterious object.