

The Thessalonica Legacy

Chapter 7: First Contact

Spike dug his claws into the doorframe and glared up at the purple unicorn. “You’ve gone through every book in this library *twice*, Twilight. And I am *not* putting them all back again, no way, no how.”

Twilight tried to push her way past the obstinate dragon and out of her living quarters, “But, Spike! I have to find out what ‘Visitation of Thessalonica’ means. It’s the key to the whole mystery!”

Spike strained against her attempts to move him “Ugh. I don’t care! You’ve already looked in every book in the library. If there were any other mention, you would have seen it already!”

Twilight stopped pushing and sunk to the floor. Spike was right. She’d poured through every book in the library in the past couple of days, first with her little art history study then with her frantic search for any mention of the strange wandering star. If the strange words appeared anywhere else in any of her books, it would be in a book she had already read, and she had no recollection of ever seeing such a phrase before.

She sighed deeply, “You’re right, Spike.” She hung her head, dejected, “so *now* what do I do?”

Spike released his death-grip on the doorframe and shrugged, “You could ask somepony.”

Now there was an idea. She thought for a moment, then gave an exasperated sigh, “But who would I ask? No pony else in this town knows much about astronomical phenomena. And most don’t know much lore beyond their local history.”

“So, ask someone outside of Ponyville.”

“Who? The only pony I know well enough to ask outside of Ponyville is the Prin...” she froze as the epiphany hit her “The Princess! I can ask the Princess!” she thumped her forehead with her hoof. “Of course! She’s ruled over Equestria since, well, forever. She probably knows exactly what it means. And...” she smiled smugly, “I *am* her most prized student. Spike! Take a letter.”

“With pleasure.” Spike retrieved a quill and parchment from the writing desk and stood ready to take dictation. Twilight cleared her throat.

“*Dearest Princess Celestia,*” she began, Spike scribbled furiously as she paced the room,

“I wish to report that two nights ago, while stargazing I spotted a strange light in the southern sky. It looked sort of like a planet, but moved very quickly from east to west like a meteorite, but did not leave a tail. Regrettably, I have exhausted the resources of the Ponyville

library in my attempt to explain this phenomenon.”

“Hang on,” called Spike, “Phena—Phenom—?” Twilight sighed and spelled it for him, then continued with her dictation.

“In fact, in all of my books I have found exactly one reference to an event that even remotely matches my observation. On page 257 of Stardust Sprinkle’s Systematic Guide to Stellar Spectacles, it states, Quote: ‘the first observance coincided with the Visitation of Thessalonica.’ What is the ‘Visitation of Thessalonica’ and how does it relate to the wandering star?”

Your faithful student, Twilight Sparkle”

She watched Spike mouth the last few words to himself as she waited for the quill to stop moving, “Did you get all that, Spike?”

“Uh huh. Would you like me to send it now?” he asked, rolling the parchment into a scroll and tying it with a ribbon.

He walked to the window and pushed it open. Holding the scroll in one hand he inhaled deeply and blew a gout of green flame. The parchment disintegrated in his hand and a sparkling wisp of smoke whisked up and away. He turned to find Twilight staring at him expectantly. She kept looking at him for a long moment.

”What?” She only reacted by biting her lower lip. Spike shuffled his feet. He was growing increasingly uncomfortable under her gaze, “Do I have something in my teeth?”

Finally, Twilight spoke, “Well?”

“Well what?”

She prodded his belly with a hoof, “Anything yet?”

Spike groaned, “For goodness sakes, Twilight! Princess Celestia doesn’t always respond to your letters *immediately*. Have some patience.”

As if on cue, his stomach rumbled and he belched loudly. Green flame swirled and materialized into a levitating parchment scroll with a muted poof.

“Ah, I knew the Princess would respond promptly.” She trotted to the center of the room.

Spike plucked the letter from the air and undid the ribbon. He cleared his throat theatrically before reading,

“My most faithful student, Twilight Sparkle,

I thank you for informing me of the strange phenomenon in the sky. I had not heard of such a light appearing in quite some time. I promise I will look into it.

I regret to inform you that it is unlikely you will find any further reference to the Thessalonica. Suffice it to say, the visitation refers to a diplomatic incident many centuries ago.

*Your mentor,
Princess Celestia”*

Twilight looked distraught. “That’s it?”

Spike looked over the letter once more, ‘That’s it.’”

Twilight was almost frantic, “That’s IT?!” she repeated, “That can’t be it! She must have said more than that.” Her horn glowed as she snatched the letter out of Spike’s clawed hand. She scanned it quickly, then gave a frustrated cry, “Ugh! This doesn’t tell me *anything!*” the parchment crumpled into a ball and flew to a corner of the room with a burst of purple haze.

The wall in Captain Mawsley’s private quarters danced with colorful swirls and waves. The translucent holographic light show reacted subtly to sound, changing pattern and color. Normally, the JumpShip captain found it soothing, but right now it was just distracting.

“Computer, external feed.” She called out. The light dissolved into a panoramic starscape, channeling the ship’s external sensors. The silver moon hung large in the scene, washing out the nearby stars. Over the horizon, the blue-green planet was just rising. She could see the computer had selected a view off the aft quarter of the ship, as much of the sky was obscured by the immense, foil-thin sail which spread out behind the ship like a parachute, gathering solar energy and feeding it into the K-F drive capacitors. Mawsley clenched her jaw. No, this was even worse. All it did was remind her of their predicament. “Computer, normal lighting.” The starscape and moon faded away, replaced by a steady, soft white glow.

She turned back to the vidscreen mounted on her small, necessarily tidy desk. “I know you’ve run the diagnostic five times already, Kelly. The nav computer is having trouble getting a lock for a reason. I don’t care how deep in the Periphery we are, it should at least be returning partial matches. Take the computer apart circuit-by-circuit if you have to. Get Jimmy in Tech to help you, if you need. Just get me a reading.”

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll see what I can do. Bridge out.” The vidscreen winked off with a chime.

She wanted to throw something. She grabbed a writing stylus and flung it as hard as she could against the wall. It bounced off the bulkhead and floor then floated lazily up towards the ceiling in the microgravity of orbit. She pinched the bridge of her nose and, pushing off, let

herself float free.

The clomp of magnetic boots and a knock at the door brought her back to the present.

The door slid open to reveal the *Silvertongue's* chief tech. She recognized his pudgy build, the goggles pushed up on his forehead, and his prosthetic bionic eye. The welcoming smile on Mawsley's face died with the look on his. He stepped over the threshold and cast his eyes around suspiciously. "Are you alone, Captain?" he asked.

"Yes. Close the door behind you." He did and strode over to the small woman. "What is it, Jean-Jacques?" He held out his hand, showing a burnt tangle of plastic and wires. "What's this?"

The technician responded in a low whisper, "I found this while repairing the burst helium seal. It's a detonator. Or what's left of one." Mawsley recoiled from the burnt mass. "I ran it through a scanalyzer. There's C8 residue. And judging from the extent of the damage, I'd say about half a block."

She looked up at him in horror, staring into his good eye. "Are you saying... Are you saying we were..." she couldn't bring herself to say the terrible word.

He nodded. Sabotage. Someone had planted a bomb on their ship, *her* ship. Rage welled up inside her. She wanted to scream, but she fought the urge. She tried to show no emotion, but she could still feel her face tightening. "Could that be what caused out misjump?" she asked, quietly.

Jean-Jacques shrugged. "The blast was right next to the Initiator. So, yes? Maybe? I dunnoh. You know I'm not that hot with hyperspace physics, Satenig."

She let the informality slide. This man had been with her almost since the beginning of her career. If any person on the *Silvertongue* had the right to use her first name, it was him.

There was still one more question; the all-important one. Who had placed the bomb?

"It must have been placed sometime between undergoing maintenance back at Valexa and the misjump." Jean-Jacques mused, "I oversaw the maintenance of that compartment myself, and I didn't find it during my post-inspection. So unless someone slipped it in while I wasn't looking, it must have been placed sometime between when the Valexa maintenance crews left and we made our jump."

"Do you think someone from the VMM crew could have planted it during their work in that section?"

The chief tech shook his head "Like I said, I inspected all their work myself after they left."

"So that leaves us two options." Mawsley counter off on her fingers, "One: someone from the maintenance team planted the bomb" she held up a hand to cut off his protest "I know, I

know. You checked it over, but it *is* possible you missed it. I know you don't like it, but we have to accept the possibility. And two: the culprit is still with us."

"There's one more thing," he added, "You know how the hatches to the aft section are kept locked for everyone except the techs? Well, I found evidence of tampering with the hatch leading from the lift shaft. The faceplate on the keypad was scratched and one of the screws is partially stripped."

"So that likely rules out anyone in Tech."

"They all have alibis, anyway. I was with them all in the forward compartment, and I know no one went aft until after the jump."

"And it couldn't have been any of the bridge crew, because I was there. Who's left?"

"Doc Langley and the medi-techs Berriman and Ciccolella. Gavin and his boys in mess. That's about it. Did anyone come over from the DropShip?"

"Just Edgar, the MechWarrior, and that grumpy Lieutenant, and they came straight from the collar to the bridge." She was thinking hard, trying to think if any of her close-nit crew would have it in them to try and damage the ship. "Alright. Check the locks and electronic logs leading in and out of the crew compartment. And check the ones leading from the docking collar, too."

"You think one of Edgar's could have planted it?"

"I don't know. I'd like to think it's more likely than it being one of our own. I trust Tartaglia. He's a good man, and he's not the suicidal type to plant a bomb on a JumpShip he's riding piggyback on."

"I'll get right on it." The tech turned to leave.

"Oh, and Jean-Jacques? Be discrete about this, would you? I don't want the scuttlebutt getting ahold of this."

Applejack liked running the family market stall, she really did. She liked playing the role of salespony and interacting with all sorts of other ponies. The break from tiring farm labor was welcome, too. It's just that, she got tired of being the only member of the Apple family that seemed to end up running it. Granny Smith was too old to keep up with it anymore. Big Macintosh always seemed to disappear whenever the cart rolled out—even though she'd still spot him in town later. Apple Bloom was too young, and judging by her performance last time she tried to help out, a little too... enthusiastic.

"*Pssst!*" she didn't hear it at first. "*Pssst! Applejack!*" A frantic whisper. She looked around

for the source. A pink hoof waved to her from behind a store sign, followed by the unmistakable magenta-maned head of Pinkie Pie. “*Applejack! Come here!*” she whispered not exactly quietly.

Applejack looked back at her applecart. It would be alright to leave it unattended for just a minute, wouldn’t it? She trotted over to where the pink pony was hiding, “What’s the matter, Sugarcube?”

“My pinkie-sense! Twitchy-twitchy-itchy-pinchy-itch!” she said frantically, pushing her left forehoof into Applejack’s face. Her face told the farm pony that she expected her to already know what she was talking about.

“I’m sorry, come again?”

Pinkie didn’t miss a beat, “My hoof! My hoof, it’s all itchy-pinchy. Something’s here! I felt it! I *saw* it!”

Applejack just stared at her friend, not comprehending. Pinkie bounced excitedly, “Come on, come on come on!” she shot off, turning only to see if Applejack was following.

Applejack looked longingly back at her applecart. When Pinkie was like this, there were only two options: ignore her or just go with it. Given the track record of her pinkie-sense, the second was likely the safer option. She caught up with Pinkie outside of Carrot Top’s house. She was about to ask why they were here when Pinkie disappeared head-first into the rosebushes lining the front below the window. A moment later, her head poked up above the branches, calling for Applejack to follow.

Applejack trotted up to the bushes, wondering how Pinkie was avoiding the thorns. She gingerly pushed her head through, wincing as the thorns grabbed at her mane. Pinkie was pointing excitedly at a spot near window where the mulch had been brushed away. In the soft soil she saw a strange shape. It was long and somewhat oval shaped; slightly wider at one end than the other and narrower in the middle. Most striking was the texture of the depression, all knobby and bumpy, but very angular and precise.

“See? See? Something *was* here! I knew it! That’s its hoofprint—er—no, pawprint? Whaddaya’ call it when it’s not a hoof and not really a paw?”

“Paw? That don’t look like no pawprint I’ve ever seen, Pinkie. You sure ‘bout that?”

“Of course, Silly-McSiller-son. What else could I have seen leaving Carrot’s party last night?”

“Wait, you’re saying something was hidin’ in the bushes when we were leavin’ last night?”

Pinkie rolled her eyes, “Well, DUH!”

Applejack felt a knot form in her stomach, “What was it?”

Pinkie leaned close and whispered, “Dunnoh. I didn’t get a good look. But whatever it was, it made that big noise in the Everfree Forest.”

Applejack was finding herself equal parts uneasy and confused, “What noise in the forest?”

“Oh, you don’t know? Fluttershy said there was a big noise in the forest that scared all the birds. Something fell—well, sort of fell but didn’t fall, and whatever was in what fell is now here in Ponyville!”

The image of toothy-jawed aliens, bright lights, and strange machines came unbidden to Applejacks’s mind. She tried to put it out of her head. After all, Twilight had said aliens probably had never been in Equestria. But, then, she *hadn’t* said aliens *didn’t* exist, and had even seemed to imply they were possible. No, it couldn’t be that. Much more likely it was just some sort of weird creature from the depths of the Everfree Forest. No pony was really sure what lurked in that awful place.

“Have ya’ shown Twilight this? Maybe she’d be able to fine it in one of her books? She is the resident brainiac, after all.”

“I was going to tell Twilight and Rarity and Rainbow and Fluttershy and Spike, but I found you first.”

Applejack backed out of the rosebush, glancing around to make sure her odd behavior hadn’t drawn attention, “Uh huh. Well, ya’ showed me, but I’m still not sure exactly why.”

With a leap, Pinkie cleared the bushes and landed next to her, “I just wanted to tell you to keep your eyes out for anything weird. And now I’ve told you! Hah!” Humming a tune, the pink pony trotted off, leaving a rather befuddled Applejack behind.

“How do they keep those waterfalls so coherent all the way down?”

“I dunnoh. This whole place is like some sort of freakin’ fairytale.” Ramirez passed the binoculars back to Corporal Virat. They were lying side by side on the backside of a hill under a holly bush. They had traded their combat helmets for floppy field caps which covered their heads and necks. Liz would have felt more comfortable with a camouflage drape or a ghillie suit, but as they didn’t have any, their camouflage fatigues would have to suffice. They weren’t ideal. Colored for the mountains and forests of Valexa, their greens and tans stood out more than she would have liked against this deep green grass.

They had spent the entire morning lying almost motionless beneath this bush. They had taken turns with their only pair of rangefinding binoculars, observing the village below and

mapping what they could see of the valley. They'd identified several buildings and outlying farms. Some, like that large tree near the middle of the town and the purple-and-pink building that looked sort of like a carousel, still had them at a loss, as did the white colonnaded building on the outskirts of the town that almost looked to be constructed out of clouds.

In the daylight, the demarcation between forest and these rolling hills was even more extreme. The organic tangle of tree trunks and undergrowth in the woods had felt familiar, normal. It could have been any other forest on most any other Inner Sphere "garden planet" in the late autumn. Out here, though, things were very different. They had expected differences in temperature and humidity, but out here it almost seemed to be a different season. While the trees in the forest had mostly lost their leaves in preparation for the coming winter, the ones here still hung to their leaves tenaciously, despite being the same species. Everything here seemed strangely ordered, almost as if every inch were carefully manicured and zealously maintained. Under the shining sun, the village, no, the entire valley looked to them to be near indescribably idyllic. It was almost a dream made manifest, complete with a fairytale castle with towering spires cantilevered off the flank of a distant mountain surrounded by majestic waterfalls.

They could see the denizens of the town through the binoculars. At first, they had watched for the telltale silhouette of a human, but every inhabitant they saw was one of those horse-like quadrupeds.

Ramirez's mind was wandering. He couldn't get the sound of their voices out of his head. "Is there a protocol for a first contact scenario with aliens?" he thought out loud.

Liz took a long time to answer, though she knew the question was more rhetorical. "Not that I know of. Maybe ComStar's Explorer Corps has one, but we sure don't."

In the over 900 years since the K-F drive had first allowed mankind to spread to the stars, and after extensive exploration and colonization of the more than 2,000 star systems of the Inner Sphere and untold more in the Periphery beyond, mankind had never once come across intelligent alien life. There had been aliens, of course; microorganisms on almost every planet, photosynthetic plant-like organisms, even animal life that filled ecological niches analogous to fish, reptiles, birds. Some had even been domesticated, like the Odessan Raxx or the dragon-like Branths of Lopez. Some alien animals could be clever, like the highly dangerous and venomous Nolan on the Steiner world of Engadine or the Alcor Bush Apes, but never to anyone's knowledge had any human explorers come across anything resembling civilization. Not even xeno-paleontological evidence. As far as anyone could tell, mankind was alone as the sole technologically-advanced creature in the universe.

Until now.

"So, what do we do when they spot us?" Liz mused.

"Treat it like an unexpected visit on a backwater world? Work out a translation and tell 'em we just need some repairs and we'll be on our way." It wasn't much of a plan, and he knew it.

Ramirez shifted in place and tried to stretch his aching legs and groaned, “Mother of Kerensky, how do you mudsloggers *do* this for hours on end?” Lying here all day had made him very glad he had never been part of an infantry scout unit or sniper team.

Liz shot him a look out of the corner of her eye, “How do you ‘Mech-jocks manage sitting on your ass in your tin cans all the time?”

He grinned, “I’ve got a mini-fridge behind the command seat.”

She raised an eyebrow at him, “You do not.”

He only smiled in response, letting his joke run its course. Looking back to the valley, he pointed at a spot in the sky, “There goes another one.”

Liz trained the binoculars on the point he indicated. Sure enough, a lone puffy white cumulus cloud was trundling across the sky, against the prevailing winds. “Yup, and there’s another of those little winged pegasuses pushing it. How do they do that?”

They watched the cloud move purposefully across the sky. Two more little specs rose up from the ground and swooped towards another cloudbank on the other side of town. The clouds evaporated one by one as the specks ducked and dived.

“Is it pegasuses or pegasi?” Liz asked.

“Pegasi, I think. Unless it’s like ‘moose’ where they’re the same.”

“What’s a ‘moose’?”

A cyan streak raced through the autumn sky, trailing a faint rainbow afterimage. Rainbow Dash stretched her wings as far as she could. She savored the feeling of the wind rushing through her mane and over her feathers. Nothing in the world was better than flying, except perhaps flying fast. Or doing aerial stunts. Or better yet, aerial stunts *while* flying fast.

With a hungry grin, she twitched her wings, sending her into a dizzying series of spins, loops, twists, and dives. She raced low, letting the long grass tickle her tummy as she swept up fallen leaves and seeds in her wake. She rocketed up high, climbing above the puffy clouds, then twisted around and dove back down again. She was cruising along the edge of the valley, near the border of the Everfree Forest, out where nopony would be around to interrupt her. This was one of her favorite places to fly. No distractions, no responsibilities, no worries. She came here often after she was done with her Weather Patrol duties to think and blow off steam.

Today, she was thinking about aliens. She’d already finished the comic book Spike had

leant her. He was right, it was totally awesome. She loved the idea of soaring through the stars, exploring strange planets and battling it out with vicious aliens and their ray guns. She'd probably never actually do it herself, of course. It was more the thought of it. After all, she wouldn't even venture into the Everfree Forest by herself, and that was right here, practically in her back yard. She put up a brave front, she had a reputation to think of, but that place still gave her the creeps. Even being this close to it sometimes gave her the willies, especially when clouds roiled up and blew around all on their own with no pegasus ponies around. That just didn't seem *natural*.

But then again, would aliens and their worlds be as unnatural as the Everfree? Twilight had said if they existed, aliens probably didn't look anything like ponies. But griffins didn't look anything like ponies, and they did fine controlling the weather in the distant lands where they were more common than ponies. Besides, Twilight didn't know everything.

She almost missed it, a different colored smudge beside a holly bush near the top of a hill. She thought it was a pile of leaves or a patch of dirt at first. She wouldn't have paid it any mind at all, except she had seen it move. She swooped down and hovered lightly, almost close enough to touch the thing. She saw now that it was alive, and what's more, there were two of them. Two odd-looking creatures sprawled out beneath the bush. Their coloring was an odd green and brown that made them sort of hard to focus on, except for what she assumed were feet, which were solid tan and the pads were covered with odd knobs and ridges. She wondered why they didn't react to her presence until she realized they were facing away from her.

Intrigued, she fluttered closer. She could smell them. She couldn't place it, but it smelled a little like cooking spices, sweat, and dirt. They didn't smell particularly good. She could also hear them, making low noises to each other. They were definitely talking, one would gesture or make a noise, and the other would respond. She strained her ears, but she couldn't make out the language. It sounded more like a series of grunts and groans than words.

One of them had an object lying next to it. She fluttered as close as she dared without alerting the creature to her presence. It was a long tube with a handle and various other bits sticking off. It looked familiar. Its identity hit her like a stray lightning bolt. She had seen something very similar in Spike's comic book. A ray gun.

Aliens. Could they be aliens? Twilight *had* said they'd look like nothing she could imagine, and these weird sprawled shapes *certainly* fit that bill.

She wanted to squeal in delight. Aliens! Real, live aliens! Right here in Equestria! And *she* had found them. She should tell somepony of course. But who? Twilight, of course, but she was clear back at the library. The aliens might be gone by the time she managed to drag that bookworm all the way out here, and then she'd get lectured on having wasted her time and how she must have let her imagination get the better of her.

Fluttershy's place was nearby. She was good with all sorts of creatures. She may be meek, but she'd reduced a giant dragon to tears! *And* stared down a cockatrice while it was turning her

to stone. If anyone could handle a pair of potentially dangerous creatures, Fluttershy could. Slipping away from the two oblivious things, she raced off. She only hoped Fluttershy was home.

She found Fluttershy tending to her flock of chickens. The little yellow pegasus was a bit taken aback by the sudden appearance of her blue friend. Rainbow pleaded with her to come quick, as she'd found a pair of strange creatures near the edge of the forest. She purposefully avoided the word 'alien' lest she scare the jumpy ball of nerves before she could get her to come along.

Fluttershy acquiesced to her friend's excited pleas and together they flapped off. Or rather, Rainbow shot ahead while Fluttershy flew low and slow and comfortably close to the ground.

"Come ON, Fluttershy! Pick up the pace! They'll be gone by the time we get there!"

"Uh. O-oh, o-okay," Fluttershy flapped a little harder with a grunt of effort. Her speed increased, but her altitude did not. Rainbow Dash rolled her eyes. How could a pegasus be this afraid of heights?

The two creatures were lying right where Rainbow had left them. She and Fluttershy touched down lightly and slowly crept forward.

"See? I told you" Dash whispered, barely audible above the faint rustle of the breeze, a volume no pony thought her capable of. Fluttershy just stood still.

Dash was getting impatient. She wanted to confront these aliens. She wanted to be as brave as Orion Nebula, Spacepony Extraordinaire. Now that she had a friend beside her, she crept forward and gently rapt on one protruding foot with her hoof.

"Blake's blood!" Ramirez yelped in surprise and jumped up. He tumbled forward, landing in a heap. Something had grabbed his foot, and it scared him half to death. Liz, the experienced infantrywoman, rolled up to her knee. She flicked off the safety on her Federated Long Rifle as she brought the sights up to her eye as fast as a blink.

Fluttershy squeaked and froze in place. "The ray gun!" Dash shouted as she fell to the ground, covering her head with her hooves.

Ramirez scrambled to his hands and knees. He found himself face to face with two of the little pony things. He recognized them immediately as two of the ones he saw from the rosebushes; the blue one with the multicolored mane and the yellow one hiding behind long, pink hair. He also saw Corporal Virat, rifle leveled and struggling to control her breathing. Time seemed to drag on.

Fluttershy had been stunned by the sudden reaction of the monsters. They looked horrible, with flat faces and long arms that ended in hands. She saw their protruding noses and large,

white teeth. She also saw the beady, white eyes. Eyes which were filled with fear.

They were afraid. The monsters were afraid. Afraid of them. Afraid of her. She had dealt with many animals, and prided herself on her ability to commune with them on a level beyond most ponies. Malice she knew was always dangerous. Anger could be quelled. Fear was easy. She could deal with fear.

“It’s ok.” She stepped forward slowly, keeping her head low. She tried to make her voice as soothing as possible. She focused on the one with the weird stick. She knew that one was more dangerous right now. “Shhh. It’s ok. Everything will be alright. We won’t hurt you.”

Ramirez watched in amazement as the pink-haired one stepped forward. It made a series of soft cooing noises. Its wide, expressive eyes and indeed its very essence exuded compassion. It was trying to communicate. Was it trying to calm them? He nearly burst out laughing at the absurdity. This dainty little creature was trying to sooth them like they were a pair of frightened kittens. It was so naïve, so sweet, and so innocent, his heart melted at the sight. In the corner of his eye, he saw Liz relax. She lowered the weapon, and slowly placed it on the ground. Trembling, she extended an arm, palm forward and fingers splayed, towards the yellow and pink miniature pegasus.

The pegasus smiled and Ramirez could almost taste sugar in his mouth. It leaned forward gently and pressed its muzzle against Liz’s outstretched hand.

The blue one, seeing this turn of events, leapt up. It shot over to Ramirez and started chattering at an impossible pace, obviously excited.

“Omigosh! Omigosh! Omigosh! Are you aliens? Are you really aliens? Where are you from? Do you have a spaceship? Do you have ray guns? Are you Martians?”

Ramirez stared at the excited ball of blue fur and feathers, trying to comprehend. Finally it stopped and stared at him expectantly with big, ruby red eyes.

“First contact, sir. What are we going to do?” Liz muttered to him under her breath. This was it. This was something mankind had never experienced before. He and Liz were the first humans to come in contact with an alien race. What happened now, what he said now would be the stuff of legend. Like the first words when man landed on the moon or New Earth.

He cleared his throat and spread his arms wide, “Take us to your leader!”

Liz’s head snapped around and she raised a very curious eyebrow, “Seriously? Universe-changing moment and we open with the oldest cliché *ever*?”

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