

First Contact

He knelt before the throne of Zencor, the ruler of the Galaxy. His laser saber was well hidden inside the folds of his cloak. He turned his head to the left, then the right. The guards were unaware, unprepared. Kyroc coiled his muscular frame, readying it for the battle to come. Zencor had had the upper hand. Kyroc vowed that Zencor would have it no more.

“Swear your fealty to me now Kyroc or live in hell!” Zencor stood from his throne and thumped his scepter on the marble floor of the throne room.

“You first!” Kyroc sprang into the air, his laser saber glowing in the dim evening light.

“Umm ... excuse me ... ?”

Kevin Larken looked up from his comic book. Yet another inconvenient customer. Kevin sighed and lay his reading face down on the counter. He rolled his ample girth from the stool where he was luxuriously and happily seated to stand behind the cash register.

With the clinging of bells and the sliding of the cash drawer he accepted the twenty-dollar bill from the man with the six pack of beer and three Slim-Jims. Kevin rolled his eyes as the late-night customer waddled out of his convenience store. It had been an inconvenient convenience shopper.

Kevin accepted this position as night clerk in order to have some quiet where he could read in peace. And maybe have a nap or two. While customers were rare, they always seemed to show up at just the wrong time. They usually bothered him when he was right in the middle of something and tonight's showdown with Zencor had been building in this serial for months. He groaned and made his way to the coolers. He would have to recharge with a Code Red before going back to his reading.

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His replacement clerk was just pulling up to the back of the store when Kevin finished packing his backpack for the walk home. Kevin put a couple of giant-sized snickers bar in the pack for later. The bars were very near expiration and the owner wanted to move them. Kevin would oblige.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"Anything exciting happen the old Stop and Go?" Stop and Go was the name of the store. The Stop was for the gas one could pump. The Go was for the runs you got from eating anything in the store. At least that was the joke.

"Same-o."

The young men traded sides of the counter and Kevin was out the door and hiking the mile or so back home. The sun was still hiding behind the horizon, so the footing could be treacherous on the crumbling asphalt road, Kevin not being able to see the holes very well. It wasn't long and Kevin took yet another tumble. It seemed like tumbling was becoming a nightly tradition. He fell onto the grass at the side of the road, thankfully, and rolled down the small hill at the side.

Kevin lay there a while to assess the extent of damage to his body. The typical soft tissue pains were evident, but he could sense no breakage in the hard stuff. Kevin sat upright and repositioned his backpack on his shoulders. That's when he saw it.

There in front of him, about ten yards, was something in the grass. It was being illuminated by the light coming from the lumber yard's warehouse that lay beyond the trees that lined the road. At first glance, the object looked like a baseball. Kevin decided to investigate.

What he had thought was a baseball, turned out to be an egg of some sort. It was white with lots of brown speckles adorning it. Kevin gingerly picked up the hard ovum and rolled in back and forth in his hands.

'Maybe it's a snake egg?' Kevin's thoughts ran quick. 'Maybe it's alligator!?' This thought excited the young man. He might be the first of his brethren to have an alligator for a pet. Pulling his backpack from his shoulders, he unzipped the large pocket and placed the egg inside. The rest of the walk home was filled with speculations and suppositions. He had plans for his egg.

Arriving at home, a small one-story ranch on a generous piece of acreage, he quietly let himself in through the front door. The TV was blaring in the living room. His grandma had fallen asleep again in her chair in front of the electronic brain deneuralizer. Pressing the power button on her remote, Kevin ventured downstairs to his bedroom, his basement lair.

The basement was arrayed with a bed, a dresser, a sofa, a desk and a massive entertainment center filled with TVs and game consoles. The walls were covered with posters that ranged from characters in science fiction to heavy metal bands. The floor was protected by numerous area rugs.

First things first, Kevin grabbed a towel from his dresser and wrapped it in a circular pattern as a makeshift nest for his recently acquired, hopefully still developing embryo. He placed the towel nest under the lamp on his desk and turned the lamp's power button to the 'On' position. Reaching into his backpack was the final action needed to extract the egg and place it in its new home.

Kevin stood back and regarded his alligator brooder engineering. All that was needed now was to sit back and wait. Kevin didn't know how long it took to hatch and alligator, but it wouldn't be long, he didn't think.

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A month passed and still no progress on the egg. Kevin was starting to think the egg was dead. He contemplated throwing it away, but there being no obvious stench or oozing, he just left it under the lamp.

The Stop and Go absorbed a major portion of Kevin's energy, but Kevin liked to whoop it up on his days off. One Saturday, he and his friend, Delbert, come home late from a night of carousing and cavorting, well that is if you call an epic night of D&D carousing and cavorting. The TV was blaring in the living room, so Kevin went to turn it off.

"What ... What are you doing!?" Grandma sat upright having been roused from a deep slumber.

"Oh, I thought you were asleep." She usually was.

"Well, I'm not!" Grandma rubbed her eyes. "And what in God's green earth have you got down there in the basement!? It's been howling and hissing all day!"

"Howling?" Kevin didn't understand. "Oh, I may have left the radio on. I'll turn it off."

"You do that. Who's that there."

"It's Delbert, Grandma. We're going to listen to some music."

"Hey." A young man, taller than most, skinnier than all and named Delbert, waved at Grandma.

"Well do it quietly, I can't hear my shows when you play your music so loud." Grandma nestled back into her recliner to resume her napping.

"OK."

Kevin and Delbert descended the stairs, but not before grabbing some Red Bulls and snacks from the kitchen. In the basement, Kevin threw the snacks on his sofa. Delbert was drawn to the desk. There was something moving there.

"Dude! Check this out!" Delbert waved his friend over to the desk.

"It hatched!" Kevin was elated. His project had come to fruition. After some time to assess the results, Kevin remarked, "That's the weirdest alligator I ever saw!"

There in the wrapped towel were the remains of an eggshell and a two-legged creature. The creature had two legs and some things that looked like flippers. It had fuzz all over its body and a black leathery skin on its head. It had a face that looked like ... well there's no other way to describe it other than the face of evil. Well, maybe that's going too far, but it was two degrees to the left of ugly. Its face could have made a young girl scream. It was a face that even a mother could not love.

"What is it?" Delbert had never seen such a sight.

"I don't know." Kevin scratched his head. "I've never seen anything like it."

The boys stood in awe of the creature on the desk. They looked at it this way and that. The creature grunted and hissed at them.

“Dude ... I think ... “ Kevin could hardly contain his excitement. “I think maybe this might be some kind of alien!?” Kevin postulated all he could derive from his experience. “You know, UFO, other world?”

“Dude!” Delbert was enthralled. “It must be. This thing’s unlike anything of Earth!”

The boys high-fived. “First Contact, Bro!”

{Now gentle reader, we need to pause here and take stock of what is happening. Some will immediately think that the creature on Kevin’s desk might be a kind of bird. Maybe even a vulture, given the bird’s hideous looks. And if it be vulture, it probably would be turkey vulture, they being indigenous to Kevin’s environs. Let us not judge the boys so hastily, however, they may have indeed contacted an alien species. The again, maybe not.}

“What do you think he’s saying?” Delbert didn’t understand the language.

“Dunno.” Kevin retrieved the package of salami he had procured from the refrigerator. “Let’s see if he’s hungry.”

Kevin offered the alien a slice and the alien quickly snapped it out of his hand. The life form had a sharp beak and made quick work of shredding the treat and gulping it down. It resumed its vocalizations. The boys watched with glee.

“We need to get Monroe.” Delbert had an idea. “He’s the expert of alien languages. He fluent in Klingon, you know.”

“Yes!” Kevin reached in his pocket and texted their friend. ‘Come at once. Alien sighting.’ That would get him.

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The boys were taking photos of the visitor on the desk when a young man wearing a dirty Atomic Rooster t-shirt, aka Monroe, arrived.

“What are you doing!?” Monroe pushed their phones away from the creature. “You want to bring the government down on our heads!?”

“Huh?”

“Those pics are going to the cloud, right?”

“Oh...” The boys started deleting the pictures.

“I for one don’t want to spend the rest of MY life eight floors below the Smithsonian Natural History Museum.” Monroe was confident that’s where the Area 51 beings had been relocated. Monroe grabbed a pillow from Kevin’s bed and stripped it of its case.

“In here.”

Kevin and Delbert put their phones in the pillowcase. Monroe threw the case out of one of the basement windows.

“Now we can get to business.” Monroe leaned in close to the grunting and hissing pile of fur on the desk. “It’s Avi Anthose for sure.”

“Huh?”

“The warrior race from Avi Anthose?” Monroe looked up; not sure he was being understood.

“Oh.”

"I wouldn't have thought they had this kind of intra-galactic travel tech, though." Monroe went back to staring at the beast. "I bet they stole it from the Thyruvians."

"Thyruvians?"

"Yes. The Thyruvians. The ones bested by the Boloqin in the battle for Corona Zeti 5?"

"Huh?"

"Rise of the Boloqin written by Cort Creek?"

Kevin was first to admit it. "Not sure ..."

"Guys if this friendship is going to last, you're gonna have to keep up on your reading."

Delbert shot Kevin a glance. They weren't as well read as Monroe.

The three turned their attention back to the alien being, the Avi Anthosian.

"What is he saying?" Delbert was curious.

"Not sure ..." Monroe rubbed the whiskers on his chin. "It's being said in a very low register. Our human ears may not be able to completely detect it all."

"Wish we could understand him. I'm assuming it's a him?" Kevin looked to Monroe; his eyebrows raised in question.

"Avi Anthosians have no gender. Excuse me, they actually have both genders." Monroe pointed his index finger to the ceiling. "I have some equipment in my van that I use for ghost hunting. It may be helpful here."

Just like that, Monroe and Delbert ascended the basement stairs to retrieve the equipment. Kevin was left with his pet baby Avi Anthosian warrior. He touched the baby's fur. The baby did not like that and bit him.

"Ouch!" Kevin put his finger in his mouth to give comfort to the bite. "I think I'll call you Xygorn." Xygorn was Kevin's favorite antihero.

Monroe and Delbert returned with the equipment and started setting it up. Kevin helped run power cords. Delbert stacked amplifiers. Monroe positioned the microphones.

"I think I'll call him Xygorn." Kevin looked to his friends for approval.

"That would be a good choice, except for the fact the Avi Anthosians have no names." Monroe said the sentence with a lilt of pompous pedantry. Of course.

The gear, having been properly arrayed, Monroe started the taping. He bid his fellows to stay as quiet as possible while he recorded the grunting and groaning of the creature from the other side of the galaxy. In time, Monroe had heard enough. He stopped the recording.

"Just as I suspected." Monroe clicked a few dials in the software on his laptop and showed the data stream displayed on the monitor to Kevin and Delbert. "You see this?" He pointed to the lowest part of the graph."

"Uhuh."

"All of this sound it is making is below what a human ear can detect." Monroe leaned back in the desk chair he had appropriated for his use. He had scored a victory in the hunt for alien life. "Now, let me up the frequency so we can hear it."

Monroe instructed the software to replay the sound snippet in a register two octaves above the original. The boys marveled at how much of the conversation they had been missing. The alien language was filled with groans and squawks and shrieks. It was a bit unnerving to hear it. It sounded, well, aggressive. They guessed a warrior race should have aggressive speech.

“Now all we need is to translate it.” Monroe was making notes on a small pad of paper he had in his pocket. “Guys, the government can’t read paper electronically.” It was a lesson for the troops.

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Morning dawned and found Delbert asleep on the sofa and Kevin dead to the world on his bed. A long curly haired Monroe sat at the desk, a pencil touching a piece of paper from time to time.

“Aha!” Monroe stood from behind the desk.

Delbert sat upright at the burst of noise in the room. “Wha?”

Kevin was woken alike. He stretched his arms wide to help the rest of his body accept that a new day was beginning. “What happened?”

“Boys, I solved it.” Monroe straightened with the victory of mind over alien speech. “I know what it’s saying.”

“What who’s saying?” Delbert wasn’t quite awake yet.

“The Avi Anthosian.”

Kevin and Delbert ambled over to the desk to find out what their friend was telling them. Monroe showed them his notepad, filled with all kind of linguistic syntax and musical notations. It all seemed jumbled and indecipherable to them.

"He's cursing you."

"What! I saved his life?" Kevin scrunched his face in disbelief.

"That my friend, is a sign of weakness to the Avi Antoseans." Monroe pointed to a certain section of his notes. "See here. He repeats this part. It correlates nicely to an ancient language of the Crue, a sect of the Beath. You see how it has musical rhyme, here."

Kevin and Delbert looked at each other as if to say they didn't follow, but if Monroe says it then it was probably true. Delbert asked the question. "What is the curse?"

"As far as I can tell he's swearing death on you. Also, there's something about drinking your blood while scratching your eyes out."

The three young men sat down in quiet contemplation of the news just reported. They were under a curse from a superior race of Avi Anthosians. They couldn't tell the government or risk lifetime imprisonment. It was a predicament that none of the boys had invited or desired or even ever anticipated. What to do.

"Let's drown it in the river!" Delbert had the solution.

"They breathe under water." Monroe had the flaw in the plan.

Kevin nodded his head. "We can take him to the old deserted barn out by the quarry."

"Promising." Monroe couldn't see an obvious problem.

"That way when the mother ship comes back, they won't know where we live?" Delbert was trying to find the logic.

"We can hope, it being so young, that it would forget by then." Kevin crossed his fingers.

"We can hope." Monroe was still strategizing the possible outcomes.

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The boys waited until dark to begin the transport. Their thinking was that would give them the best cover from any warrior Anthosians roaming about looking for the kidnapper of their offspring. They used a large cardboard box (and many rest stops) to transport the baby Avi Anthosian to the deserted barn. They lay the box in a former horse stall; it being somewhat shielded from the elements. The roof of the barn had long ago caved in from neglect, and the rain and weather had beaten the structure even further toward its final fate when it would lie as a simple pile of wood.

The young being in the cardboard box started a groaning and hissing, unlike he had before. The boys were somewhat concerned. Had they offended or hurt the little ugly guy in their haste to sequester him away from their houses? In time, however, they became very aware of why the little one was so agitated.

There, above their heads, sat a large two-legged creature with a red leathery head, much like their tiny charge in the horse stall. The yellowish fur that adorned the body of the baby, had been replaced by giant black and brown feathers. The flippers of the baby were now two giant wings on the monster in the rafters.

Now was their time. This was the battle they had read about most of their lives. It would be their chance to rid the Earth of the menacing Avi Anthosian herd. They would fight to the death to combat these evil usurpers. Kevin steeled himself for the fight to come.

“Anthosians! Run for your life!” Monroe was already out the door of the dilapidated barn and halfway down the road.

Delbert and Kevin looked at each other. Their supposed friend and someone they had assumed ‘had their back’ had quite literally flown ‘the coop’.

Kevin reached for a rusty rake laying on the floor. Delbert balled his fists ready to deliver a punch. The ostensible Avi Anthosian in the roof of the barn jumped from his perch.

The invader landed firmly on Kevin’s head and immediately started a strategy of viciously clawing and pecking at Kevin’s head.

“Ahhhh!” It was all Kevin could utter given the high quality of the pain he was feeling. Kevin swung his rake high and at his head but whiffed on contacting anything but the beam behind him.

Delbert prang to the rescue. He let fly his balled fist at the bird with all the force that his slender frame could muster. Delbert’s punch landed true. It landed on Kevin’s chin.

The blow to his chin, having added to the pains the clawing and pecking had evinced, resulted in Kevin’s fall to the floor of the barn. Kevin clutched his entire head in his arms to ward off further devastation that either of the other two would want to manifest.

Delbert lumped to help his friend. “Let’s go!” Delbert raised Kevin to his feet.

The boys ran from the building, just escaping the collapse of the hayloft, Kevin having loosened the beam (that was the last bastion holding it up) with his rake. The young men ran all the way home.

Epilogue

Kevin's head wounds healed quickly enough, but for the next few weeks and months, Kevin was plagued by the unseen wounds of the battle. He would wake in the middle of the night in a sweat from the nightmares. The Avi Anthosians were still inflicting pain on the boy. The great beast that had been his attacker was still visiting him in his dreams.

It wasn't long, though, and a co-worker of Kevin's pointed out a turkey vulture feeding on a decomposing dead animal at the side of the road.

"That's a turkey vulture?" Kevin couldn't help but recognize how much the vulture looked like the Avi Anthosians.

The nightmares stopped after that.

