

Great news! We've made contact with aliens. You can't miss them. They're right up there, next to the moon. They showed up out of nowhere on tech that's way more advanced than anything we could ever imagine. And they're huge, apparently.

Some of us were scared, some of us were kinda hype. You know how it is, that's just what happens when big things happen. One day someone tried to nuke them and nothing happened. Most of us gave up on nuking them right then and there but they kept trying and then they were wiped off the map. Just like that. That really knocked some sense into us. One of my old high school buddies took it upon himself to make contact with them and ask them what they wanted from us. And I don't know what he did, but it worked. They beamed a message in the sky back to us. It took a while to crack it, but when we did?

"Don't be afraid. We have great technology. We can help you."

So let's skip ahead a bit. My friend... let's just call him Jacob for now. He'd gotten a bunch of funding and he'd figured out a way to communicate back and forth consistently. He basically ended up becoming a translator, kinda. And he shook hands with all kinds of experts who wanted to get in on the alien business. Rocket scientists who wanted to know how they moved through space, language professors who wanted to figure out how to talk to them more better, world leaders who wanted to know how nukeable they were. Under phase 2 he was working with some zoologists and speculative evolution sci-fi nerds to ask the aliens about their insides and in return we sent the aliens a bunch of information about our own insides, eye for an eyestalk. That's how I got in by the way, I was one of the nerds. Plus he owed me. Anyway.

I was cooped up in their lab mapping out some educated guesses about what their dicks might look like, indirectly witnessing a lot of juicy office drama that they never told the press about, eating office snacks, and so on. It felt grandiose, important, and also kinda fun. And as the months went by more and more came out of our work. The world started to change. We talked to them about food and they gave us machines that could feed entire nations. We talked to them about global warming and they sucked up a bunch of greenhouse gases for us. We talked about space travel and bam, schematics for a faster than light engine. Every conversation took forever, but we always learned something new. It was a new chapter for human civilization and the critics were raving. Pog.

But one day Jacob took me aside and told me he was freaked out.

"They know how we work now, man. And we sorta know how they work? But we don't know anything about how their technology works, like, fundamentally. They give us proprietary tech that we can't crack and it does amazing things but we still don't know how it does it. They're always one step ahead, so much more advanced than us. And they're so much smarter than me! What if I say something dumb and piss them off? And then it's all over? It's killing me, dude. What am I supposed to do?"

I tried to get him to calm down, told him he was doing a great job et cetera, and also if they're super smart then it'd be kinda dumb of them to flip out anyway so like, why would they do that. They want dialogue too, right? I guess that helped, because he seemed to mellow out after that. He went back to the meetings and conference calls and interviews and stuff. Back to business.

Eventually I finished my work in the lab and they sent me home, but I made sure to tune in whenever I got the chance just to catch up with what they were doing in there. Jacob was always busy, but I caught glimpses of him in the news and on the livestreams. He was so focused on work. And as chief translator he was our collective bottleneck. I couldn't even imagine how stressful it was, trying to keep up with them.

Then one day they picked him up and took him away. And then one day he came back.

He took uneasy steps on new limbs and paused in the middle of the room. Hunched over from the new weight of his own body. The feelers on his back waved back and forth, tasting the air. The sides of his head were encased in a metal cage bolted to his cranium, strange machinery protecting new organs too delicate for our atmosphere. He looked down at the people from his previous life, towering over them, skin stretched over organic shapes we'd never seen before, only imagined. His expression, at the risk of anthropomorphizing it, seemed pensive. Like he was trying to find the right words.

I was glued to the screen trying to make out every single detail of his new anatomy. I was shaking with excitement. There he was. The uplifted human. The next step for our evolving species. The aliens had gifted him with a piece of themselves. He was an ambassador, in linguistics and in genetics. And I wanted to hear every word he had to say. What did he see out there? What did they tell him?

The new man stood there in silence and looked around at his friends and colleagues. The world held its breath. Until he locked eyes with head scientist Patrick, two time Nobel Prize winner, and growled. Lunged. And bit his face off.