

Howard Bolger's
Fabulous Space Café

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The real estate agent turned off onto Route 7. “Don’t get to these parts much. No one comes through this side of town since they opened the new interstate. You sure you want a business out here?”

“It’s all I can afford.”

He switched on his left turn signal and slowed to wait for the opposing traffic to clear. “Suit yourself.” He pulled into the badly rutted parking lot and stopped in front of a small, rundown diner with the green and white *Available* sign in the window.

Howard looked around the small diner. There was a counter with four chairs, a small cooking area, a pantry, and a set of restrooms on the side of the building. There was also plenty of dust. “Perfect. I’ve always wanted my own restaur-ant.”

“If you want it... I’ll get the lease out of my car.”

In a few days the dust was gone. The stove worked. The water was hooked up for the restrooms. There was still peeling paint on the walls and a few roaches had evaded the *Black Flag* he’d been spraying everywhere. He put the *Open* sign in the window and turned on the grill. It was time for business.

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At about two in the afternoon a pickup pulled into the lot. It had tools and pipes hanging from racks on its side. There was a sign for some plumbing company on the door. A man in greasy overalls sauntered out of the vehicle and entered. He plopped himself down on the stool nearest the door. “So you’re the

schmuck that took over this dump.”

“Yep,” Howard replied. “You want anything?”

“I’ll try one of your cheeseburgers. And a Coke. You got Coke?”

Howard popped open a can and slid it down the red and white counter. It came to a stop right in front of the customer. “What the hell’d idea was it to come out here?”

“People need a place to go to. Sort of an event. Especially yuppies.” He tossed a burger patty onto the grill and got out the package of buns. “Chips come with it or you can get fries if you want?”

“Chips. Yuppies... out here?”

“The place needs a little work. Something to draw ‘em out here.”

“Like what?”

“Don’t know yet. I’m waiting for inspiration.” He turned over the patty. Splat, finally got that damn roach. He tossed it onto the bun and squeezed it under the lettuce. He checked to see if his customer was looking. He was gawking out the window at some dog in the parking lot. He took the patty off the heat and assembled the burger, tossed it onto a plate, and grabbed one of the small sample bags the potato chip salesman had left behind.

“Thanks.” He took a bite of the burger. “Not bad.”

Howard dragged the handmade wooden sign out into the parking lot. The paint was finally dry. “Ain’t gonna help, man,” greeted him when he came back in.

“It’s just temporary, until I establish a motif.”

“Motif? That some new kind of sign or somethin’?”

“Something like that.”

“Only thing in these parts nowadays is illegal aliens and flying saucers.” He downed the final bite.

“Flying saucers?”

“This valley is the UFO capital of North America. You didn’t know that?” He put a five dollar bill onto the counter. “It was in that inquiring thing my wife buys at the market.”

Howard gave him a dollar change. “I don’t believe in that stuff.”

“Me neither.” He went out into the lot and climbed into his pickup. Howard went back to looking for more roaches.

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It was almost time to lock up when he noticed the lights in the distance. It had turned cloudy and the lights stood out clearly in the late afternoon sky. They came closer. It wasn’t just lights, it was a silver flying saucer about the size of a small bus. It hovered for a moment, then landed right in the parking lot. Three little green men with antennae on their heads climbed out and waddled into the diner. “Woq et eÿopè?”

“Pardon?”

The bigger of the three four-footers turned on a little machine it carried on its belt. "Are you affiliated with the galactic chain of *Howard's Diners*?"

"Yeah," he lied.

The aliens talked between them-selves for a moment. "This place doesn't look like a *Howard's Diner*?"

"Haven't finished decorating. Just opened up *today*."

They talked amongst themselves some more. "Very well, we'll have three orders of *Jheluck*."

"Shipment didn't come in, you'll have to have something else, sorry."

"What do you suggest?"

"Cheeseburgers and a Coke."

They talked between themselves some more. "Very well." They climbed up onto the stools. "When do you expect to have *Jheluck*?"

"Hopefully tomorrow." He tossed three patties onto the grill. "It comes with chips or you can have fries. Fries are extra."

"We'll try the fries."

The aliens ate their burgers in silence, though Howard was getting some odd looks from the short one on the end. "More fries, cutie," it said after downing its second helping.

Howard started some more fries, then got out the big cleaver and started chopping onions. When the fries were ready, they were quickly devoured. Then the aliens started staring at him. He was getting a very uncomfortable feeling. "Are you sure that this is a *Howard's Diner*?"

“Yeah. Why?”

“Because *Howard’s Diners* always provide complimentary sex after every meal.”

“I was just waiting to see if you wanted dessert.” He went over to the pantry door. “Right this way folks.” He didn’t know if they were gentlemen or ladies or something else. He took a firm grip on the big cleaver and lead them into the pantry.

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“I’ll bet it’s boarded up,” the real estate agent told his secretary. “That guy took off’s my guess.” He got into his car and headed for Route 7 to collect the rent on the rundown diner. He was astonished to find the parking lot full of cars and a line was stretching out of the tiny building. He had to park out on the street. The customers gave him a dirty look when he cut to the head of the line. “I’m not eating here, business only.”

“Hey, guy,” Howard greeted him.

The real estate agent couldn’t believe the change in the little place. “Those chairs look like they came right out of a rocket ship or something.”

“Glad you like ‘em.” Howard handed him a rent check and a sandwich. “It’s my new alien burger. If s out of this world.”

He bit into the sandwich. It was deli-cious. “What kind of meat is this?”

“It’s my own secret blend.” Howard dropped off an order to one of the local doctors sitting in one of the fancy space chairs.

“This lighting in here is so relaxing. Where are all the bulbs?”

“Ain’t any, if s all indirect.”

“How’d you get that flying saucer sign up onto the roof?”

“How does anyone get a flying saucer onto the roof? I flew it up there. I’ve got to get back to work. I’m hoping for a new shipment of meat tonight.”