

The Thing From the Thing From Another World

by Colin P. Davies

When all the shooting and blasting and bludgeoning were finally over and the hairy giant carcass had been hauled onto seven different trucks and the disgusting residue of blood and alien guts had been shovelled from the White House lawn, the twopla relaxed and stretched out its six slender legs across the crisp brown bed of a blade of dead grass.

Washington was beautiful in the Fall, no doubt about it, but the visitor was disappointed. The capital was not on its itinerary. The trip should have been quiet and comfortable. That was before the Grog had decided to have a word with the President — a naïve decision which had been destined to end in misunderstanding. When the time came to go home, the twopla would have to hitch a new ride.

As was the way with twoplas, the male bi-brain was subservient but vocal and, after several hundred sleep cycles cooped up in the ear cavity of the enterprising trader from Grogor, he was now able to let rip.

On the left side of the twopla's black spherical head, the male mouth set up a rapid chatter: "I feel naked. Sunlight ignites my melancholy. Find me a hole. Find me a dark hole. Home is such a sweet place to be. Take me home. I feel..."

"Quiet!" On the right side of the head, the female mouth pressed hard lips together.

A human was approaching.

The twopla adjusted its backpack, unfurled transparent wings and took to the air. It matched speed with the running man and alighted on his shoulder, then hooked its tail into the open weave of his sports jacket.

"I'm hungry," said the male half of the brain.

"Patience." The creature extended its eye stalks to gaze up at the huge whorls of the human's ear. Ripe for the picking... or conveying.

The male began to sing, "I feel hungry... worryingly hungry... alarmingly h-u-n-g-r-y."

The twopla flew up again, sighted the dark, warm cave within the human's head, "A word in your ear," and zipped inside.

"What?" said the male. "Are we home?"

The twopla pushed through the web of hairs and wax and nestled in. The cave fell black and the walls groaned as a finger poked at an itch. "This is it," said the female. "The vacation starts here."

"What? What did you say?"

"I said, we're going to Roswell."

* * *

Sam Hinks burst into the offices of the *Gazette* and tossed his sports jacket over his chair.

Frank came out of his own office and dropped the papers he was carrying. "Sam... you look kinda awful!"

"Jesus, Frank. You shoulda seen this thing. Three storeys tall and a face like a nightmare." He slumped into his chair and loosened his tie. "Coffee. Somebody get me a coffee!"

Billy, young and eager, obliged.

Frank picked up his papers and sat on the edge of Sam's desk. "Where's Jilly? Where's the pictures? SHE DID GET PICTURES?"

"I dunno... she took off when that alien thing made a grab for her. She musta thought Fay Wray."

Sam took his coffee from Billy without a word.

"The Air Force lost the flying saucer," said Frank. "Popped on and off the radar."

"So it's still out there?"

Billy nibbled at a donut. "What did the alien thing want?"

"I forgot to ask." Sam gulped his coffee, coughed and sprayed.

Frank dropped down from the desk and rubbed at his leg. "Find Jilly. With any luck she'll have some great close-ups."

Sam moved to the door, pulling his jacket on. "Can't... I've got to go."

"Go where? Have you got a lead?"

Sam snatched the donut from Billy's hand. "A hunch. Like a voice in my head. I've got to go to Roswell."

* * *

The twopla's male bi-brain began to reminisce. "You never did explain adequately why we can't have a pet." It scooped ear wax into its mouth.

"We can have a pet."

"You changed our mind?" the male mumbled.

The female tongue licked its wings and spat debris at a hair stalagmite. *Twang!* The hair thrummed, sending pleasant vibrations through the twopla's six feet. "I'm on holiday... I'm amenable to persuasion."

"Can we have a snapper?"

"They bite."

"A graviton?"

"We're not keeping a pet that weighs more than we do."

“An angel?”

“You ate the last one!”

The male chewed silently.

The female intoned, “ROSWELL.” The human was already heading in the right direction, but it didn’t hurt to keep him on task. “I suppose I’m actually saying we can’t have a pet.”

“Hah! I’m happy to be right for once,” said the male.

“Ask me again on the way home... when we’re free of the drag of this planet.”

The male wiped wax from its lips, then said, “You never did explain adequately why we can’t have a pet.”

* * *

Sam pulled his car onto the dusty lot outside Ace Bargains Alien Emporium and stepped out of the air-conditioned interior into the volcanic heat of the midday New Mexico sun.

The air inside the shop was thick and smelled of latex. In a shady corner, a leather-faced old man, wearing cowboy boots and a stetson, sat strumming a guitar.

“Excuse me,” said Sam.

The old man put the guitar against the hessian wall. He struggled to get up, but his huge belly defeated him. Sweat trickled down his forehead. “Where you from, youngster?”

Sam pushed through the hanging displays of Grey masks. “Washington.”

A white smile split the man’s brown face. “You see the aleen?”

Sam nodded.

“You see them kill it?”

“Yes.”

“Damn fools.”

“You didn’t see the damage it did to the White House lawns.”

The old man grunted.

“Could I have a word with Mr Bargain?” said Sam.

“Huh?” The man poked at his ear, then glanced at his fingertip.

“Ace... Ace Bargain.”

The old man laughed. “You’re none too sharp, youngster. What do you do?”

“I’m a reporter.”

The old man’s eyebrows rose. “You one of those... sceptics?”

“I just report. I don’t have an opinion.”

The old man pushed up his hat and wiped the back of his hand across his brow. “Everyone has an opinion.”

“The only opinion I have right now involves food.” Something buzzed in Sam’s ear and he poked at it.

“Now you’re talking my language,” said the old man.

“Tell me... where can I get something to eat?”

* * *

The twopla from home and the twopla resident in Roswell met in the eye socket of a Grey mask. A moment’s pain and a moment’s pleasure ensured the continuity of the outpost and the transfer of accumulated data. Smoke rose from the friction of chitinous bellies. The male bi-brains were traditionally silent during the coupling.

The two twoplas performed the ritual double-helix flight without comment and settled on a window frame beside the dessicated carcass of a terran bug.

“So which outpost ya hitchin’ to next, youngster?” asked the resident’s female mouth.

“Pardon? You’ve been here too long!” The tourist wafted its wings, moving the dead bug further away. “Groom Ridge next, though the visiting order isn’t important. To us it’s all so new and exciting. We still can’t believe we won this opportunity. And I hear the senior resident has been evicted and is returning home with us. We’ll go there last.”

“And how is home?”

“The same. Looked like being a good summer. We’ll hear all about it when we get back for the new semester.”

The resident preened its eyes. “Nice backpack.”

“Thanks... we made it ourselves.”

The sun scorched through the glass. The dead bug crackled.

The resident male bi-brain spoke up: “Is there any food in it? In your backpack? Anything from home? We need a change. What about cake? Have you got any cake? Tell us...”

“Quiet!” said the resident female.

“Looks like our human is leaving,” said the tourist. It took to the air and hovered a moment. “Thanks for the hospitality.”

“Shucks... oh, sorry... we mean, enjoy your trip and remember us to the other residents.”

* * *

Sam drove the two miles to the diner with the old man’s final words rapping on the door of his journalistic intuition: “I keep planning to up and leave, but a voice in my head always tells me to stay.” Sam also had the voice. It told him where to go next — he didn’t understand how or why. Perhaps all great journalists had the voice... the hunch... the place where all great stories come from.

Two weeks on and the door remained unanswered. He'd visited Fat Billy in Groom Ridge and Shirley at the Pie Shack in Point Pleasant, then Balloon Eddy at Mount Rainier and so many other huge, obese and distended examples of humanity that he'd lost both count and interest. Now, as he left Hungry George's Pasta Palace in Gulf Breeze, the late-morning sun drew beads from his brow.

He squeezed in front of the steering wheel and groaned. He should have settled for just one pizza — the second was an indulgence. The third was a tragedy.

Just one more place to try, thank God! Somehow he knew he was nearing the end of his investigation. He unfurled the road map and checked out his final destination. Would he find the answer there? He couldn't know — he still didn't know the question.

He turned the car onto the highway and headed into a day as dry as his imagination.

Next stop... Graceland.

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