

A Gift from the Stars

By Tom Jolly © 2021

After viewing dozens of clichéd human first-contact movies, the aliens decided to land on the White House lawn to deliver their gift. The President stayed inside, opting to risk the VP as an emissary of good will, and the VP needed to grease the skids for the next election anyway.

The aliens came out of their spaceship, levitating from the ship's orifice by a sparkling beam of light, and settled on to the lawn. They were eight feet tall with an uncountable number of tendrils that appeared to be created and absorbed as they moved. One pundit described them as "made of worms that are constantly eating each other." A gray mantle that could have been skin, grease, or clothing lay across their backside and a lump that might have been a head bulged outward. It had no eyes or mouth.

The aliens said nothing, but extended a cluster of wormy tendrils and offered the VP and his welcoming crew a small glass cube, ten centimeters on a side, pastel patterns shifting mysteriously inside. The VP tentatively accepted it, but had nothing to offer in return and mumbled some words to that effect while staring deeply and dazedly into the cube at the pretty colors.

The aliens turned, levitated back into their ship, and left.

The VP looked at the cube, then at the ship, and said, "What the hell just happened?" His popularity rating shot up by two percent, his sentiment reflecting that of most Americans.



The scene was broadcast everywhere. Russia, China, and a dozen other countries that the US wasn't as concerned about demanded to know what was in the glass cube, what depths of knowledge and innovation were concealed within.

The top scientists in the US, along with the mysterious cube, were sequestered. They probed and measured and beamed beams at the cube with every ray and particle known to man,

searching for the information that had to be buried inside. “What if it’s something we just don’t know how to measure?” one scientist asked. “Liquid neutrino diagrams, or some dark matter crystal, or some mysterious particle we’ve never even speculated about?” So they probed deeper and harder at the fringes of physics, but the strange cube failed to release its secrets.

When the US didn’t reveal the amazing scientific discoveries that were undoubtedly being collected, hoarded, and securely hidden away, the ire of Russia and China escalated. The lame excuses that came from the US, “We can’t tell you anything because we don’t know anything!” and “For all we can tell, it’s just a sparkly glass cube,” fell on deaf ears. Threats ensued, and finally, to keep the US from surging ahead in all the fields of science, dominating the world with their secret alien technology, China launched a nuclear warhead at the suspected location of the cube even as Russia was putting together an invasion force to steal it.

Missiles flew. Humans died. From space, a thousand nuclear flares lit the world. A radioactive nuclear wasteland was all that remained.



In space, looking down at the obliterated landscape scoured clean of any human presence, one of the aliens shook its wormy head. “I can’t believe you did it,” it said. “Destroyed them all.”

“And it cost me less than a credit.” It nodded toward the planet. “You just have to understand humans.”

“A credit? For that stupid glass cube?”

“They were on sale. You lose the bet, by the way,” said the other. “Pay up.”

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