



FIRST CONTACT

A short story

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‘Whoah!’

Danny backed against a tree, one hand raised over his eyes. The piercingly bright light bore down on him from above, pinning him to the spot like a trapped insect. Was it a police helicopter, mistaking him for a runaway criminal? But there was no loud chopping helicopter noise. Instead it was eerily quiet, with a just faint kind of whistling, humming sound hanging in the air.

Then the searchlight beam slid to one side, and he was able to see more clearly the unearthly shape looming above him.

Suspended as if by invisible wires, it was only ten or so metres above him. It was big and round, a gleaming silver framed against the early evening sky, and ringed with a pulsing blue light.

No. It *couldn't* be.

But it was. *It was a flying saucer!*

Danny wanted to dive behind the tree ... but although it was frightening, the saucer was also strangely, hypnotically beautiful. He couldn't take his eyes off it, even as his neck began to ache with the effort of gazing upwards.

He started to get the bizarre feeling the saucer was *looking* at him. Or rather, he supposed, whoever (or whatever) was on board was looking at him. Who was it? The army? *Aliens*? Would they be friendly, or ...? Surely they wouldn't hurt a defenceless ten-year-old? Would they?

Suddenly the saucer's beam of light swung back on to him. Danny clamped shut his eyes against the painful glare and pressed himself back against the rough tree trunk. His heart was racing but he also felt oddly calm.

And he saw the events of the previous ten minutes play back inside his head like a movie ...

‘Flipping pain in the neck! Why does he want to meet out here in the middle of nowhere anyway?’ muttered Uncle Colin as he wrestled with the steering wheel. Next to him Danny clutched both sides of the passenger seat as the car bounced on down the rutted track. He didn’t usually get car-sick but then he didn’t often get into a car with Uncle Colin, and now he remembered why.

‘Um – don’t forget I’ve got to be home by seven-thirty,’ Danny ventured. Uncle Colin was looking after him for the day while his parents worked and his usual child-minder, Mrs Hartnell, was ill. Colin had the day off but had received a phone call from someone called Professor Dune asking to meet them somewhere near the Ganymede Institute where they both worked. Apparently the Professor was head of a top-secret project that Uncle Colin (or Doctor Colin Box, as he was known at the Institute) was also working on.

‘What. Oh – yeah. Don’t worry Danny. This shouldn’t take long. Actually here we are – I think.’

The car lurched to a halt in a shower of dirt and grass. The track had come to an end under a green gloomy canopy of swaying trees. Danny looked across at Uncle Colin, who seemed even more twitchy than usual.

‘Where’s here?’ Danny asked.

‘Travis Wood. There’s a clearing over to the left apparently, where Professor Dune wants to meet me. In about ...’ He glanced at his watch. ‘Oh, flip, about three minutes ago. Better dash. He’s literally *never* late. Now Danny – I won’t be long ...’

‘Can’t I come with you?’

‘No, best not. Er – secret stuff, you know. Just stay here, OK? Please. Don’t leave the car OK? Promise? This should only take a few minutes. Why he couldn’t tell me on the phone I don’t know ...’

‘Or can’t he tell you at work? At the Ganymede Institute?’

‘Well that’s the thing. He hasn’t been around for weeks. He won’t go back to the Institute for some reason. Anyway – must dash. Be back in a mo.’ And with that, Colin bounced out of the car and, after glancing furtively all around, he batted his way through some bushes and disappeared.

It was suddenly very quiet. Nothing moved apart from the shimmering, hissing leaves on the branches above. Danny got the uncomfortable feeling that if they got stuck here, no-one would find them for a very long time.

He was just starting to wonder how the mysterious Professor Dune had got to this lonely place – there were no other cars parked there – when he caught sight of a moving shape in the wing mirror. He looked around and saw a dark green Land Rover rocking up the track towards him. Maybe that was the Professor? But Uncle Colin had said he was never late ...

Danny couldn’t be sure what made him do what he did next. Maybe Uncle Colin’s jumpiness was infectious. Whatever it was, Danny was suddenly completely certain that he did *not* want to be seen by whoever was in that Land Rover. And so he scrambled between the driver and passenger seats and onto the floor of the car just behind them, and pulled the stained hairy blanket (that belonged to Pluto, Colin’s absent dog) down on top of him.

He lay there, very still. He heard the Land Rover's engine draw closer, and then stop. Then the slam of a car door. Quiet footsteps, coming near. Right beside the car. Danny thought he actually *felt* someone's eyes scanning the inside of the car, and a bolt of cold electricity fizzed up his back. Would they see him? *Had* they seen him? And wait a minute – were the car doors locked ...?

His nose tickled with one of Pluto's hairs, and he had the sudden overwhelming need to sneeze. At exactly the same moment he was seized with the equally pressing urge to shake his left leg, now burning with pins and needles.

The next few seconds stretched into infinity. He began to think his nose would explode and his leg would drop off.

Then, with a surge of cool relief, he heard the footsteps retreat from the car and fade into silence. He waited for the sound of the Land Rover's door and the engine to re-start, but there was nothing. Finally he threw off the hairy blanket, hauled himself onto the back seat and waited for the sneeze – which then, of course, decided not to show up after all.

Outside, the Land Rover was still and empty. It was khaki green and looked like it might belong to the army. But there was no sign of its owner, nor of Uncle Colin. What now? Uncle Colin had told him to stay put, but Danny's leg screamed with cramp and he needed to walk around. So he opened the door and hobbled out, shaking his leg like a demented Irish dancer. Finally, he leant back against the car and wondered how long he'd have to wait, or whether he'd have to dive back inside at any moment.

'Do not move!'

The sharp command cracked through the air like a whip. Danny gasped and crouched down, staring wildly all around him. But he couldn't see anyone, and gradually he stood up straight again. The order couldn't have been directed at him. In fact it had come from somewhere in the trees that Uncle Colin had disappeared into a few minutes earlier. But it wasn't Uncle Colin's voice; it had sounded more like a woman's, though on the deep side and from a rather scary, angry woman. Not Professor Dune either, if he was a man.

Before he knew what he was doing, Danny was ducking beneath the branches and moving stealthily along a faint path. Uncle Colin might be in danger. He hadn't left his phone in the car with Danny, so there was no way of calling for help.

Very soon Danny could hear the low buzz of voices from ahead. He could make out Uncle Colin's, and another man's, and that woman's – quieter now but still sounding sharp and cold. Then, as he drew up behind a gnarled old tree trunk, he began to hear the words more clearly. Warily he peered around the trunk and saw three figures standing close together in a small clearing beyond.

There was Uncle Colin, red-faced, eyes blazing. Danny had never seen him look so angry. In front of him was the woman; tall, with viciously cropped yellow-blond hair, and standing so ruler-straight it was like she had a pole shoved up the back of her khaki uniform. Then, with his back to Danny so he couldn't see his face, was a man he assumed to be Professor Dune.

'... and I don't think *you* understand, Professor Dune,' the woman soldier was saying. 'This is a matter of national security. Project Europa is the military's concern now.'

‘No, no, Captain Frost!’ huffed Uncle Colin. ‘This is a *civilian* project. We don’t need the military poking their noses in. We know what you’d do with it, don’t we!’

‘Calm yourself, Colin,’ said Professor Dune quietly. ‘There’s nothing the Captain here can do, not really. Project Europa is safe from her interfering army friends. The DISC cannot just be taken by her or by anyone else.’

‘Is that right?’ sneered Captain Frost. ‘We’ll see about that. I do have security access to the DISC, as you well know ...’

‘Access, yes,’ cut in Uncle Colin. ‘But Professor Dune is head of Project Europa. You can’t do anything without his say-so.’

‘Don’t interrupt me!’ snapped the Captain. ‘There’s no escape from me, you know. I’m monitoring all communications. How do you think I knew you were both here? And if the Professor doesn’t cooperate, then I have the authority to place him under house arrest and interrogate him until he tells me what I ... *we* want to know.’

‘How – how dare you?’ spluttered Uncle Colin. ‘Arrest the Professor! I – I ...’ His round face flushed like a red balloon, so much that Danny was afraid it might go pop.

‘That’s why I don’t want him disappearing again,’ continued Captain Frost. ‘But I’ve got him now – haven’t I Professor?’ She gave an oily chuckle.

That was when Danny sneezed.

Unbelievably, his stupid, treacherous nose exploded with a force roughly equal to a smallish volcano. That flipping hair-bag Pluto!

A stunned silence fell. Danny ducked back behind the tree trunk just as Captain Frost’s pale face snapped towards him. ‘Who’s there?’ she demanded. ‘Doctor Box – you said you came here alone!’

‘I – I ... um,’ stammered Uncle Colin.

Oh flip, thought Danny, wiping his streaming eyes. That’s done it. For a second or two, he considered stepping out in to the clearing and showing himself. How bad could it be? This Captain Frost was a bit scary, yes, but Uncle Colin and Professor Dune were both there too. What could she do?

Then he heard Uncle Colin say something that made his heart freeze to a dead stop. ‘No – Captain Frost – put that gun away!’

Danny turned and ran.

‘You there!’ Captain Frost commanded from somewhere behind. ‘Stop now – or face the consequences!’

Danny didn’t stop. He hurled himself through the greenery, hands up to fend off the twigs and leaves lashing around his head. He didn’t dare look back.

He soon realised he’d taken a wrong turn, because the lane and Uncle Colin’s car completely failed to reappear. Somehow he’d stumbled off the path and he was running blind through the gloomy trees. Until he reached another clearing and, while his aching lungs fought for breath, something made him look up.

And he saw it.

Now there was just bright light; and a whistling, humming sound, strangely beautiful, swelling inside his head. *The song of the stars.* Wait ... where did that thought come from?

And a voice, echoing inside his brain ... ‘This won’t hurt, Danny. Shame we can’t get to know each other – but too dangerous with old Frosty-Knickers lurking about, you get me? The less you know the better – for now anyway. At least you distracted her from Professor

Dune. He's legged it in the opposite direction. And here's Colin. Seeya mate. Maybe we'll see the stars another day, innit.'

The voice faded. Was that God? If so, God sounded a bit like Russell Brand. Danny was just dimly wondering whether God sounding like Russell Brand was a good thing or not, when ...

He found himself slumped in the passenger seat of Uncle Colin's car as it purred along the main road in the evening twilight. Travis Wood was gone.

He glanced across at Uncle Colin, who looked flushed and dishevelled, sweat glistening on his forehead – but when he looked back at Danny he grinned. 'Oh Danny ... thank goodness. Nearly home now. Are you feeling OK?'

'Yeah, great.' Danny sat up straight and blinked. He had a tiny vague pain in his head, like he'd just eaten very cold ice-cream; and his neck ached. 'How long have I been asleep? I don't remember ...'

'Oh – not long. You, er, must have fallen asleep in the car while I was gone. I mean, you did. Definitely.'

'Oh ... actually, are *you* OK? You look hot.'

'Yeah, fine. I didn't realise how heavy ten-year-olds were.'

'Pardon?'

'Nothing. Anyway – sure you're OK? Your, um, head and everything?'

'Yeah.' Danny picked a leaf out of his hair and frowned. How did that get there?

'And ... um ...' Uncle Colin cleared his throat. 'Er – do you remember anything?'

'About what?'

‘Nothing. Nothing.’ Uncle Colin gave a heaving sigh, and muttered, ‘Wish we could memory-wipe flipping Captain Frost. That would solve a lot of problems.’

‘Pardon?’

‘Nothing.’

‘Did you meet Professor Dune?’

‘Oh – yeah. But he had to run.’

‘Who’s Captain Frost?’

‘No-one. She had to run too.’

Danny yawned and snuggled back into the seat. He closed his eyes and dozed.

... and had a very weird dream. About running through a forest ... and a tall, angry, pale female soldier ... and a flying saucer. The bits and pieces of the dream buzzed around inside his head, and the more he tried to grab them, the more they splintered and scattered, until he could remember them no more.

Then Russell Brand popped up and said, ‘Maybe we’ll see the stars one day, innit?’

After that Danny’s thoughts dissolved and he just slept.

The End

I hope you enjoyed this short story. It's just the start of Danny's adventures, which really begin in earnest in *Danny Chaucer's Flying Saucer*, available in e-book, paperback and hardback from Amazon, the iBookstore and the Albury Fiction website - <https://fiction.alburybooks.com/>.

You can also find out more about *Danny Chaucer's Flying Saucer* at: <http://dannychaucersflyingsaucer.com/>.