

—ALIEN FAJITAS

by Boyd E. Harris

The mini-van pressed through the monotonous plains of the Texas panhandle. The overhead monitor powered by a multi-disc DVD player and rotating with a half dozen titles was the only thing that saved them from the barrage of “are-we-there-yet” and “how-much-longer” inquiries from the back seat. These had been replaced by the voices of Albert Brooks and Ellen DeGeneres, later to be traded for Billy Crystal and John Goodman.

Calvin Hollis was on the verge of big things, though he did expect them to come with a price. His family life had become almost non-existent as of late, and though their financial troubles would be all but finished in short order, his hectic work and travel schedules had caused increased tension between Darla and him. Calvin had taken the necessary steps to remedy; a drive to Colorado and a week’s stay at a dude ranch for the whole family.

The van crossed the state line and passed through Hobbs.

“Hey kids, we’ve just entered New Mexico!”

“Wow,” was the uninspired response from twelve-year-old Craig, who was engaged with the overhead screen.

Amber, a couple of years younger, followed with, “Finally outta’ Texas,” but there was no enthusiasm in her voice.

Calvin looked at Darla and winked. “The mobile DVD system is the invention of the century.”

Darla smiled back. “No kidding.”

They passed a green sign that read, “Hobbs, population 13,922”.

She said, “Guess what?”

“What?”

“It’s Calvin in Hobbs.”

“Hardy-har-har.”

Giggles came from the back, proving the impressionable ones weren’t totally missing the travel experience.

“Forty-five minutes to Roswell, and then we’ll fit in a quick lunch at Close Encounters.”

Darla dropped her smile. “I knew you’d sneak business into this trip.”

Calvin glanced at her. “I swear, it won’t take any longer than lunch. I just really need to meet the owner personally. We are at a very sensitive point in the deal, and we need to keep in constant contact with him so he doesn’t go cold.”

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Darla nodded. He knew she understood how much it meant to the family for this acquisition to go through. A line of themed restaurants would make history for American Multi-Foods, and that meant there'd be a much needed promotion for him.

Calvin turned his attention back to the highway. In the distance ahead, beyond the stoplights of the few approaching intersections, a puffy white cloud stood tall, seemingly harmless, but he knew better.

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"ALIEN LOOKOUT STATION" read the stencil-painted sign. Below in smaller print was "MAPS - STAR CHARTS - SOUVENIRS". An arrow crossed above the top of the letters, and Calvin followed it with his eyes. He looked to the ridge a quarter of a mile from the road and spotted a small building, the writing on it too small to be read from the highway. There were two or three dozen cars parked around the building.

"Hey kids, there's an Alien Lookout Station!"

"Yeah Dad. Great." Enthusiasm was also on vacation.

Billy Crystal's spirited voice exchanged with John Goodman's in an animated conversation displayed on the overhanging monitor.

Calvin sighed and looked at Darla, who was resting her eyes. The whole Alien trend was something the rest of his family didn't really appreciate.

In a day when mounting reports of UFOs, alien sightings, and extraterrestrial abductions had the media in power-hype mode, he was a man to recognize opportunity. This town would be the source of his goldmine. His corporate offices would be placed here purely for effect. And the single restaurant would burst into a nationwide alien theme-oriented phenomenon. Others in the home office had tasted the food, overnighted from a scout, and he'd heard it was damn good. It was chicken, of course, but the secret recipe was something to be held in high regard. He wouldn't have his hands on it until the deal was inked with Maynard Chakford.

Within a few minutes they reached downtown Roswell, passed the Museum of Extraterrestrial History, several tourist gift shops, and he pulled up to a large, warehouse-sized building. A giant, green flashing light out front read, "Close Encounters of the Culinary Kind".

Calvin pulled in. "Okay kids, y'all ready for some good food?"

"Sure Dad, but the movie is almost over. Can we..."

Calvin clicked the DVD player off. A side benefit to having the system was its front seat control panel. "You have all afternoon to finish watching *Monster's Inc.* for your twelfth time. Now let's go in and sample the recipes that will put each of you through college."

Sighs came from the back, but were followed by Darla's strict voice. "Okay kids, let's go! Do you want to make it into Santa Fe tonight or not?"

Despite the parental strain, the Hollises found themselves at the hostess stand.

A teenage girl stood behind it, failing to make eye contact. She smiled, but seemed preoccupied by the American History textbook behind the counter. "Table for four?"

Calvin nodded, but peered across the eatery to Maynard Chakford, the current