

“Roswell, 1947”

By Lauren Rivers

July 4, 1947

Less than ten miles outside of Roswell a lone figure sat on the hood of her truck staring up at the starlit sky. On nights like this it was calm and quiet with little to disturb her other than the occasional sound of wildlife. She came out to places like this for the solitude. Devoid of the sounds of civilization it was the perfect environment for her to gather her thoughts and allow her mind to center itself from the chaos of daily existence. Piper Ross smiled as she leaned back against the windshield stretching in a signature feline fashion while she considered her agenda. With an excited purr she pulled her hair back to keep it out of the way, tying into a functional but effective ponytail.

No matter where she went she always carried a camera though tonight she expected she would get far more use out of the other thing she had brought with her. Climbing off the hood she pulled a case out of the back of the truck and opened it to reveal her telescope. With luck she would see some stars tonight. It was a clear evening, with little to obscure the view.

Examining the fine instrument she removed the legs and set them up first, extending the three metal rods until they were at their ideal height. Once they were in place in a suitable location she took the telescope in both paws and set it carefully in the cradle before securing the device to the rest of the apparatus. She glanced into the eyepiece being certain it was properly aligned before she began her observations.

The telescope had been a gift from her father on her sixteenth birthday. Most other girls wanted things like makeup or jewelry but Piper had always been the practical sort. It wasn't that she didn't like those sorts of things but to her they weren't important. It tended to mean she was never considered one of the popular kids but she preferred it that way spending most of her school years in the library instead of anywhere else. So it was even though her college career.

It was a deep red color with silver highlights and the top of the line for when it was made. The telescope was capable of seeing far into the heavens to the distant stars beyond. She had spent countless nights on her family's roof watching the lights in the sky and taking note of each and every one.

Her stargazing guide and notebook sat on the passenger seat of her truck. Piper took a moment to grab them before returning to her examination of the skies above. She leaned forward to peer into the eyepiece and noted the stars seemed especially bright tonight. Perhaps it was just fortunate weather but she could not recall ever having seen them quite so luminous in the sky before. Piper smirked searching the heavens for something no one else had discovered before.

"One of these days I'm going to find something they can name after me," she said to no one in particular. It was a little goal of hers to make her mark in the stars given how many of them were out there. The tigress wanted so badly to have her name belonging to something in the great grand universe that would last far longer than the flesh and bones that held her consciousness. She moved the telescope slightly to the right and took note of the usual stars in the sky at this time of night.

She took some notes on her findings before looking into the viewfinder again. She was about to move the telescope for the second time when she caught movement out of the corner of her eye. "What the hell is that?" she asked. The tigress looked again to be certain she was not imagining things but there was a streak of light that had coalesced

into a single point, and then shifted direction. It seemed to stop moving as she considered the unusual sight before her. She stared down at her shoes for a moment attempting to reconcile the unusual behavior of the unknown object.

Piper forced herself to look once again at the mysterious object and noted it was no longer just a dot. It had seemingly erupted into a ball of fire. As she attempted to make sense of what she was seeing it suddenly occurred to her why it had appeared to stop moving. It was headed right for her.

The thought seemed unbelievable. The odds of a celestial body of any kind heading right for the spot on which she stood were almost impossible to calculate. Nevertheless, whatever it was seemed to be headed directly for her location.

Acting swiftly she disassembled her telescope and placed it back in the case in the back of the truck before throwing the legs into the rear and starting the engine. She pressed her foot paw on the gas pedal sending her truck surging forward as she sped away hoping she could get enough distance between her and the impact point, whatever that was. She looked out the window turning her head behind her in time to see the flaming object become surrounded with a warm glow. She aimed her truck for the hill up ahead hoping the added height would work in her favor. No sooner had she reached the top of the hill when she felt the force of impact as the object crashed to the surface of the earth and slid for some distance leaving a deep flaming wound in the desert sand.

Piper slammed on the brakes and held the steering wheel tight in her paws for a few long seconds before she gathered her wits enough to put the vehicle in park and got out to see what had crash landed so near to where she had been observing it. The tigress looked out over the vast expanse of desert to take in the unbelievable sight of a spacecraft resting at the end of the ship's fiery path. The vehicle if that's indeed what it was resembled a fighter of some sort with a gray hull and an oval shaped design with a window in the front as well as some weapons she did not recognize mounted on the bottom of the hull. She glanced around to be certain there was no one around and then walked back to her truck to retrieve a pair of binoculars.

Training them on the alien craft she watched in silence prepared to conclude there were no survivors when the rear hatch blew open in a burst of gas. Her eyes widened as three armored beings emerged from the craft and seemed to scan the area for any signs of opposition. All three of them appeared to be armed with weapons she could not even begin to identify. The one she assumed to be the leader gestured for his men to retrieve some things from the ship before they tapped a device on their wrists. With a shimmer that barely lasted a moment they changed before her eyes to resemble a set of normal sentient beings not unlike the inhabitants of this planet. Each of them looked at the others to confirm their disguises before setting off in the direction of the nearest spot of civilization.

As one of them glanced in her direction Piper ducked to the ground and pressed as close to the sand as she could. "Oh shit!" She felt her heart pound and her breath get heavy waiting for her imminent disintegration by some alien death ray. When her destruction didn't come, she looked once again to find the craft's occupants long gone.

Piper glanced around before forcing herself to stand and make her way down to the crash site. She needed to tell someone but she would need proof before anyone would believe her. The only way she could get it was to go down there and retrieve a part of the ship as evidence. She walked up to the open hatch holding her flashlight on

the opening, waiting for several seconds to be certain nothing was going to emerge before entering the ship.

She scanned the interior for anything suitable, identifying a small object visible from an exposed panel which had likely fallen off in the crash. Piper reached in and grabbed hold of it, hesitating only a moment before pulling it free. The device was cylindrical and warm to the touch. Her evidence in paw, she quickly exited the ship and held her prize to her chest.

Not wanting to stick around to see what happened next, she got back into her truck and made her way towards home as fast as her truck would carry her.

ROSWELL FBI OFFICE

Locked in a contest of wills Agent Spencer Cole held his ground as he kept his eyes firmly locked on the rhinoceros seated across from him. Neither man had moved a muscle in over ten minutes as each waited for the other to be the first to do so. Between them rested a pair of empty coffee mugs as the object of their competition became clear. “It’s your turn.”

“I did it last time,” the rhinoceros replied.

“No you didn’t,” the gembok insisted.

The rhinoceros exhaled and leaned back in his chair. “I made the coffee on the day you were out so it’s not my turn. In fact, that means you have to do it twice.”

“Are the two of you seriously arguing about whose turn it is to make the damn coffee?” a male voice asked. The voice belonged to a dark brown haired raccoon in a blue suit by the name of Special Agent in Charge Aaron Rodgers, also known as their boss. The raccoon folded his arms as he looked from one to the other earning a contrite expression from each. “Just do it so we can get down to some real work. If I have to come down here and settle this one more time I’m going to see that you both end up wishing I hadn’t. Is that clear?”

“Yes, sir.” His partner, Agent Keith Hannelly, stood up and nodded respectfully at their superior. “Did you need us?”

“I’ve got an assignment for you. We have an unidentified object crashing out in the desert in New Mexico,” he said, handing Spencer a folder.

“Do we know what it is?” he asked.

“That would be the unidentified part. It’s your job to go out there and see what the hell it is and whether or not it presents a threat. Contain the object and bring it in if you have to. We’ve got a hangar set up somewhere nearby. If the military shows up don’t get in their way but tell them we’ve got jurisdiction until the president tells me otherwise. Make sure you work fast, even though it’s out in the desert there’s no telling how many people many have seen this thing come down. We need to get this under control before it gets out of hand. I don’t want a ton of tourists poking at whatever it happens to be. For all we know it could be a god damned Russian spy plane. Get out there right away.”

“Is this all we know?” Keith asked.

“I’m afraid so, boys. We don’t have much, which is why the faster you get out there, the better.” The raccoon gave them a nod and turned back towards his office.

Keith tilted his head towards the folder and slipped on his jacket with practiced ease. "What do you think that is?" he asked.

"The hell if I know," he replied. "You're driving."

Keith rolled his eyes and shrugged. "Where are we headed?" he asked.

"To the emptiest spot in the whole New Mexico desert." He held up a map and pointed to the spot where the mysterious object had touched down. The two men headed to their car and in less than a minute were on their way to intercept the unknown craft.

Neither one of them spoke during the drive, with Keith focused on where they were going and Spencer reading the report, which was almost nothing at all. So far all they had was a single image captured by a military plane that flew overhead after someone had seen the object headed for the desert by chance. Police had already set up roadblocks to all the routes towards this object but it had been an hour before that had happened not to mention the fact that one couldn't seal off the entire desert.

When they arrived at the object it appeared undisturbed. Coming to rest at the terminus of a deep gash in the soil the object of their investigation appeared to have survived the impact more or less in one piece. The car came to a stop a short distance away as Keith cut the engine and the pair emerged from the vehicle to inspect the unusual discovery.

"You ever see anything like that before?" Spencer asked his partner.

"Can't say I have," the rhinoceros replied, pulling his weapon and holding it at his side.

"Expecting trouble?" he asked.

The rhinoceros pointed to the large gray object. "We're dealing with something that clearly does not look like it's from around here. I'm not taking any chances."

"Fair enough," Spencer said, drawing his own weapon as the two of them stepped close enough to see inside the open hatch. "Where the hell is the containment team?" he asked.

"I don't know, but we can't afford to wait for them. If this thing is Russian we need to know now." Keith stepped into the open hatch and entered the crashed object, disappearing inside.

Hesitating only a moment, Spencer followed suit. He glanced around at the complicated controls noticing some of the displays were darkened and clearly without power. He stepped forward from the rear looking at a tall cylindrical object in the center of the craft which seemed to capture his attention. The object was eight feet tall with a glowing blue center and a metal base which appeared to be covered with controls and writing in a language he did not recognize. Several connections split off from the top going in all directions. "Definitely not Russian." The rhinoceros took a step forward finding his partner towards the front of the craft. "Find anything?"

"Nothing that makes sense to me. From the looks of it there was a crew inside though the lack of bodies tells me they're not here anymore. Barring any other explanation I'd say they're out there somewhere," the rhinoceros said.

Spencer nodded. "Odds are they won't get far if they're from outer space. I don't know about you but I think most people would notice little green men." He looked at the three workstations towards the front of the ship. Two of them were side by side in front of the large window with the last a chair positioned directly in front of the cylindrical

object with a panel on either side. The gemsbok took a seat in the chair and squeezed the arm rests. "I guess they're about our size."

Keith leaned over the forward panels and shrugged. "Looks like whatever caused the crash did a number on the ship. Most of these panels are non responsive."

"Well, don't touch anything," Spencer replied. "Who knows what sorts of things are hidden away in here?" he asked.

The rhinoceros walked back towards the rear of the craft. "I'd be more worried about whether or not the original owners are coming back, or for that matter, what they might be doing now."

"One thing at a time. We need to get this craft secured as soon as possible and get someone to look at it who can make sense of all this." Spencer glanced around the interior of the ship. "Then you and I are going to go looking for the ship's crew and hope they haven't gotten too far."

"What do you plan to do once we catch up with them?" he asked.

"I guess that depends on what they do to us first," the gemsbok replied.

"Care to wager what sort of greeting we're likely to get?" the rhinoceros asked, leaning against the nearest wall.

Spencer held up his revolver. "I don't know about you but I plan on keeping this handy at all times."

"I suppose it's too much to hope these might be the 'we come in peace' sort of aliens?" The rhino met his partner's glance.

The other agent wrinkled his muzzle and shook his head. "I hope so, but my experience in law enforcement has taught me to anticipate the worst. Until I know otherwise I'm sticking with that assumption."

"No wonder you're so much fun at the Christmas party," Keith said.

Spencer shot him a raised eyebrow before he stepped back outside and looked around. The gemsbok began at the hatch of the crashed spacecraft and began walking away from both it and their vehicle. Scanning the ground he shined his flashlight at the dirt until he found what he was looking for. "Bingo."

"What?"

"Take a look at this." On the ground, a set of tire tracks passed through the crash path of the unknown object and headed off in the direction of the raised ground some distance away. "Looks like we might have a witness."

Keith stepped up to the tire tracks and then turned back towards the deep gash in the dirt. "You think someone saw this thing go down?" he asked.

"It's a possibility. If someone did see something we need to find out who they are and what they saw." Spencer followed the tire marks as far as his eye could detect. "We need to see who they belong to."

Less than a minute later a pair of FBI vehicles pulled up to the site and began to secure the alien object. Freed of their immediate responsibilities the pair climbed into their vehicle and set off to follow the tracks to the top of the hill. Spencer locked eyes with his partner knowing they had to find whoever it was.

He gripped the steering wheel as they pulled onto the road with neither of them saying anything as they headed towards the nearest spot of civilization. It would take at least an hour to reach the city and who knows how long after that to find whoever their

witness might be. They and the aliens already had a significant head start. Spencer only hoped it was not too late.

* * *

A young fox and his girlfriend drove along the desert road with the top down and music blaring. He smiled at the young vixen pleased at how lucky he was to have nailed such a foxy lady. There was a reason female foxes were considered desirable, and depending on whom you asked they were wild when you got them in the right moods. He wrapped his arm around her and gave her a lick on the cheek.

“Stop it, Bobby,” she said.

“But I thought you liked it when I did that to you,” he replied. She blushed coyly which really just meant she was playing hard to get. “Oh, I see,” he said, comprehending. “Maybe tonight you and I can take a picnic out to the desert, find a nice quiet spot and spend a romantic evening under the stars.” He squeezed her shoulder. “How does that sound?”

His girlfriend smiled ever so slightly and crossed her ankles. “Sounds like a pretty idea if it’s the right spot.”

“I know a place,” he said. A week ago he had come across the most idyllic spot in the New Mexico desert, if such a description could be applied to the vast expanse of sand and dry weather vegetation. It had a nice view and a decent amount of visual interest, enough that there was something to look at if one was so inclined, and it was a great spot to stargaze. He leaned over to kiss her again when she stiffened and pointed ahead.

“BOBBY!”

He slammed on the brakes just in time to avoid hitting a trio of men he hadn’t even seen in the road a moment ago. He glanced behind him and then all the way around finding no place where they could have hidden, and yet all of the sudden they were in front of them. The three looked like wolves with expressionless faces and the same empty eyes. He almost might say they were triplets as they even dressed in an identical suit. All three of them turned as one to the young fox. One opened his mouth but said something in an unintelligible gibberish.

The fox perked his ears up. “Come again?” he asked. “I don’t know where you three came from but I almost hit you! Are you okay?” When there was no response he looked to the other two. “You can’t just walk down the middle of the road, even out here. It’s dangerous and you could get hurt. Now if you boys want I can give you a ride to the nearest town but you’re going to have to find your own way from there.”

“Bobby, don’t,” the vixen said. “They give me a weird vibe.”

Turning back to the three wolves, which had not moved from the first time he had seen them, he shrugged. “I could call someone when I get to a phone. You want me to call you a cab?” he asked.

One of them turned to the others and nodded. “Language deciphered.”

“Language deciphered?” the fox asked. “What does that mean?”

The alpha wolf turned to the fox and grabbed him by the shirt. “We require your vehicle.”

“Hey, paws off, man!” he protested.

“Let him go!” his girlfriend shouted.

The second wolf looked at the first. With a nod, he removed some sort of weapon and aimed it at the fox. With one arm he threw him across the road and into the desert. The fox coughed blood as he looked up just in time to see the weapon discharge. A green pulse struck him in the chest and before he knew it his entire body glowed with that same color. He had just enough time to say his girlfriend’s name before the fox collapsed into a pile of green goo.

“AHHH!!!!” she screamed, jumping out of the car and running in the opposite direction. Before she got more than a dozen feet a green pulse hit her in the same place and she too collapsed into glowing green ooze. Two of the three wolves touched their wrists and their appearances changed to resemble the fox couple they had just dispatched. The third looked to them as they got into the car. “You know what to do.” The pair nodded and drove off.

* * *

Piper pulled into her driveway faster than usual and skidded to a stop less than a foot from the garage. The tigress felt her heart still racing in her chest as she attempted to erase what she saw from her memory. She didn’t think those things had seen her, but there was no reason to take chances. She cursed as she probably shouldn’t have headed straight home, but it was too late now. Piper turned her engine off and climbed out grabbing her photo equipment and leaving her telescope in the back of the truck. She fished out her house keys and unlocked the door.

Her house was nothing special. It was a one bedroom place with a small kitchen and living room full of the cheapest furniture money could buy. She set her camera on the kitchen counter and pressed the button for her answering machine. The blinking light told her she had two messages. The first one did not surprise her.

“Piper, honey, it’s your mother. Do me a favor and call me sometime. I worry about you in that tiny house. Are you eating enough? You know that I don’t like how much time you spend out there in the desert. I was hoping we could get together for lunch one of these days. I’m still your mother, aren’t I? It would be nice to see my daughter’s face one in a while.” Her mother’s rambled on for another minute or two until finally the machine beeped and the second message began.

“Hey, Piper, it’s Cody. I figured you were out doing your stargazing thing. You know one of these days if you look skyward long enough someone’s going to look right back. Anyway, call me.” She smiled at the thought of the young ursine, who was one of her best friends. The bear was handsome if her mother’s opinion could be counted upon, and she insisted that one of these days she should bring the boy home for her to meet him. Of course Piper didn’t think of him as boyfriend material but regardless he was a friend and she knew her mother wouldn’t let up until she agreed to introduce them. The longer she put it off the more insistent her mother would become. Even still, she wanted to prolong their interaction for a while longer. She let out a deep breath and walked into the bedroom to set her camera stuff down.

Returning to the front door she picked up the phone and dialed Cody’s number. It rang several times until the sleepy voice of the ursine came through on the other end.

“Hello?” he asked. *“Who is this?”*

“Cody, it’s me, Piper. Don’t tell me you were sleeping,” she said.

“I’m a growing bear, I need my beauty sleep,” he replied.

“You’re older than I am!” she shouted.

“And still growing. What do you want?”

Piper sighed. “I need to talk to you. Now. Can you come over to my place?” she asked. “Better yet, I’m coming to you. Get dressed.”

“Okay,” he replied, and hung up the phone. Piper grabbed her camera equipment and her emergency kit and threw both into the back of her vehicle. Less than five minutes later she was back on the road, headed to Cody’s. She only hoped he could help her make sense of all this.