



## Explorations: First Contact

*Scarlett R. Algee (Editor) , Peter Cawdron , Ralph Kern , Josh Hayes , Robert M. Campbell , Scott Moon , Stephen Moss , Nathan Hystad , more... P.P. Corcoran , Jacob Cooper , Richard Fox , Chris Kennedy , Nick Bailey , P.J. Strebor , Isaac Hooke ...less*

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An exciting collection of First Contact science fiction stories, each set in the same universe. Join many of today's best SF authors as they tell you stories of explorations.

The Sphere ship appeared suddenly, damaged and dying. After making contact, Earth learned they weren't alone in the universe. The Sphere gave them knowledge of space travel, and co-ordinates to other races spread across the expanse. It asked them to continue its mission of exploration and contact, but also left them with a stark warning: Stay away from the Star.

Over the next twenty years, the United Earth Foundation formed, and their ships were built, their displacement drives giving them the sphere shape when engaged.

Their Mission: First Contact

Prologue - Stephen Moss

Deja Vu - Peter Cawdron

The Signal - Ralph Kern

Status: Inactive - Richard Fox

The Bottom Line - Chris Kennedy

End of the Line - Robert M. Campbell

Mercurial Rescue - Isaac Hooke

The Mission - PP Corcoran

The Last Command - Nick Bailey

Sleeping Giant - PJ Strebor

The Darklady - Scott Moon

Triaxial - Stephen Moss

Harbinger - Josh Hayes

Epilogue - Empyrean - Jacob Cooper

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## From Reader Review Explorations: First Contact for online ebook

### **Beth says**

#### **Terrific bunch of stories!**

Typically in a short story book I end up not reading all of them but all of these stories set in the same universe held my interest. They were all good!

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### **Mick Bird says**

Just as expected a great and interesting read

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### **J.R. Handley says**

A fun collection of short stories, but with a shared world! I recommend this to anyone who likes anthologies or short stories packed full of SciFy goodness!

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### **Phil Leader says**

Science Fiction has always been at home with the short story. The science fiction magazines from the mid 20th Century onwards was frequently the only way of writers to get their work published. As a bonus the concept of science fiction - taking an idea and seeing where it goes - is a really nice fit for short stories.

This collection is more than just a selection of tales from up and coming science fiction writers; all the stories are set in the same universe and are in some way on the theme of first contact. The introduction sets this up, with a damaged alien ship discovered on the moon. It is able to transmit details of nearby inhabited star systems - and a terrible warning about a dangerous foe - before it shuts down. Mankind learns all it can from the message and the wreckage before setting out for the stars.

Each story then follows the fate of the mission to one of the star systems. This is the point where any similarity in stories ends as each writer brings their own style and ideas for their contribution (although there are some neat nods to the other stories now and again). The result is a satisfying mix of different ideas but all within a consistent whole.

That's not to say that every story hit the spot for me, but that's inevitable given the range of authors here, but every story was interesting to read. There are also the occasional one that felt a little rushed, the idea either too big for a short story, or too many ideas vying for the limited word count. But these are minor niggles and the standard of all the stories is very high.

Overall a really good collection showcasing the talents of current science fiction writers. If you like interesting ideas and gripping stories about aliens and space exploration you won't be disappointed.

## **Norma says**

"Eat your heart out, Ikea."

Simply sublime - I don't really want to say more than that.

Exciting and often very creative first contact takes from 14 authors, each story short but a further gem on this necklace of science fiction pleasure. Some of the authors' other work I already knew and admired, some were new to me and I know I will investigate them further.

This book is a joy, a treat, a discovery.

If you enjoy original, first rate S.F. don't wait. Get it now.

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## **Terry says**

### **What a read!**

Fun, thought provoking, and at times, in far away places, SCARY! Glad those times are as far into the future as they are in millions of miles away! But, what if something, a dead spaceship perhaps, shows up tomorrow?

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## **Cindy says**

Wanted this book to be much better than it was. The premise of exploring all the ways first contact can and will go wrong is interesting, has the possibilities for great story telling. These are not great stories; minimal to no character development and as for the so-called "hard science", no, not there. I am no scientist, have no interest in learning basic science (see high school grades!) but even I could tell that everything other than the military stuff was made-up, convenient and magical. And to be really picky the typos either got worse or the stories so disappointing that the typos became more obtrusive and further detracted from the quality of the stories.

Not recommended.

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## **Seamus says**

A great compilation of Science Fiction tales from a bunch of excellent writers for an amazingly cheap price!

The stories are each quick reads, ranging from short stories to novella size, so you are generally straight into the heart of the story.

My favorite was Deja Vu, the freaky space nightmare from Peter Cawdron, who is one of the great indie authors today.

Another fav was the fast paced The Mission by PP Corcoran.

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## **Bill says**

excellent anthology

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## **Kavita Favelle says**

Enjoyable collection of short sci-fi stories from different authors, tied together by a shared universe. The styles of each author, and of the stories they have written, are very different, but I enjoyed all of them and several left me wanting more of that particular storyline.

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## **Steven Poore says**

An ambitious undertaking, getting a collection of authors to write first contact stories all set in the same sandbox universe. Those themes start to feel slightly restrictive after a while, with almost every story working to the same beats and structure. It's an all-male table of writers too, which feels a bit anomalous. The tales that work best are those that play with the boundaries of the tropes, though Ralph Kern's step-by-step survey expedition is also well worth the time for any Traveller fans. The pick of the crop for me includes Scott Moon's *The Darklady*, Stephen Moss's *Triaxial*, and Peter Cawdron's *Deja Vu*, with a grin-and-thumbs-up for PJ Strebor's passing sideswipe at the stupidity of Brexit.

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## **Meenaz Lodhi says**

Great sci fi stories in the same universe, written by great authors. Some of them I got to know them here.

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## **Ray Dunn says**

### **Tales of the unexpected**

First contact is an excellent subject for this series of related short stories. Whilst it has been done many times before, there is always room for more original takes.

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## **Jason says**

This is a brilliant collection of short stories about not only the exploration of space, but how each of these explorers interact with aliens in first contact scenarios. Explorations – First Contact does not just mean the content of the stories - this is a great opportunity to make First Contact with the talented Authors that have written these stories if you haven't already, discover how outstanding they are, and explore their other works as well. These anthologies are always a great introduction, and this is no exception. Without giving too much

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away, there is a common thread amongst the stories, not just first contact, but with a Spheroid ship, some even have linkages. These are fantastic tales, with exceptional, character driven story lines that are just too good to miss. Following are individual reviews for those that are interested:

Déjà vu – Peter Cawdron – 5/5 – it's no secret that Cawdron is one of my favourite Authors, and when you read his books, it is easy to see why. His writing is truly gifted, and Déjà vu is no different, delivering a spell binding tale that leaves you riveted and wanting more. The great thing is this time, there will be as he has said this short is going to be transformed into a full length book. This story follows a group of astronauts on a ship in Earth orbit, going through a routine, but something is not right for one of them, and when she starts to question things, her universe unravels in ways she cannot fathom. This story is exceptional and continues to show why Cawdron is so brilliant.

The Signal – Ralph Kern – 5/5 – This was an interesting story, one that was a little slow to start, but as it unfolded, you were left thinking 'WOW'. There are some fascinating concepts with the technology (as with most of the shorts in this collection), and Kern's Characters are exceptionally well written. The story begins with a signal that is received from outer space, and as a result, later down the track, a ship is developed and sent to investigate. I don't want to give any spoilers away, but the outcomes are rather amazing. The ship goes to investigate the signal and what they find at both the point of origin is not the story, it is what is beyond that is the real tale here.

This is a very clever and very well written story, with a brilliant ending.

Status: Inactive – Richard Fox – 4/5 – Fox has written some great books, and this was another example of his fantastic writing. It takes a little to get into, building slowly as it follows two asteroid miners in the depths of space.

As they are searching around through what was once a planetoid but is now a debris field, they find something rather amazing, and this leads to an incredible discovery. Fox manages to generate some fascinating characters in a magnificent back drop as he unfolds his tale. This is a really enthralling tale, and well worth the read.

The Bottom Line – Chris Kennedy – 4.5/5 – This is a story of a poor Captain who thinks he is in charge of his ship, but soon learns that he isn't. What is meant to be a mission of diplomacy, soon turns into a military mission. They are sent to a planet to get weapons, but the planet does not have a pleasant greeting for the ship. This is a story of betrayal, intrigue, with a lot of twists and a really unbelievable ending.

This story shows the true power of bureaucracy, and how it can lead to dangerous things. The flow of events in this story is just an incredible read, and well worth it, I could not put it down. Kennedy had some excellent characters in this first contact piece, as well as some awesome aliens.

End of the Line – Robert M Campbell – 4.5/5 – This was one of my favourites, mainly because it has one of the best inventions in Science – The Dyson Sphere. Campbell could have stopped there and I would have been happy, but he went further. Humans have found a sphere on which they have based a lot of technology. As they look around the galaxy, they discover a system with a slowly developing Dyson Sphere. They then build a ship to set off to investigate the sphere. I don't want to give away spoilers for such a fascinating story. But the crew get more than they bargain for when they reach the completed Sphere.

Campbell has some brilliant characters to go with the storyline and the incredible world building he has done. This was a wonderful story, well worth the read.

Mercurial Rescue – Isaac Hooke – 5/5 – I have to admit that I am a huge fan of Isaac Hooke, but that doesn't stop the fact that this was another sensational tale. I found it very reminiscent of some of the Deep Space 9 episodes. It follows a couple of astronauts on a planet expedition that make an unusual find. When they return with the find to their base camp, it leads to a series of extraordinary events, and a discovery that will alter their lives forever.

I loved the concept of this story, and would really like to see it expanded, I find this type of first contact story

always interesting and the interactions fascinating – and Hooke does not let us down with the minor series he gives us here.

The only complaint is that it is too short. Definitely a favourite in this collection, and one of the must reads.

The Mission – PP Corcoran – 5/5 – A crew have been sent to investigate a Sphere ship that has been hulled and left in space. They approach it and enter it, unsure of what they are going to find. Upon initially entering, they search the ship and find it a ghost ship, like walking through a haunted maze for giants.

This is a really clever story, and one of those ones that makes you wonder what is going to leap out from the next corridor. It makes the story totally captivating. Without giving spoilers away, as the landing party progresses, there are obviously encounters, but it is how Corcoran has written them, bringing his characters and the scene to life that makes this a really thrilling short and a really fantastic read that is easily one of the first you should read in this collection.

The Last Command – Nick Bailey – 4/5 – The Autumn Song's is on a mission to find the intelligent life that they know is in the system they have just arrived at. They get more than they bargained for. Firstly they encounter a planet that has been decimated by something unknown – and was meant to be the source of the life they were seeking. Then, they encounter a gargantuan vessel the likes of which seems impossible. The crew is sent into a frenzy, when they are contacted by an artificial construct who has some interesting questions for the Captain, these lead to a fascinating story that is incredibly creative and captivating. I really enjoyed how this story played out, the characters, the background stories, and universe Bailey had created for his ship to live in. Great Read.

Sleeping Giant – PJ Strebor – 3.5/5 – This short reminded me a bit of a Star Trek Voyager episode to start with. The Captain, annoyed at her XO because of his behaviour and attitude (and he is being pretty disrespectful), throws him in the brig for 3wks to teach him a lesson as they are on a long-term mission. She then goes and talks to him, he repents saying it was due to being looked over, all is forgiven, and then they all of a sudden are lovers – on a starship. The Captain and XO? So that happens. But the main story is in relation to a dangerous entity. The ship arrives to find another long range vessel derelict, and the place they were meant to be going having been totally destroyed. On checking, they realise it was attacked by something powerful. This is where an all powerful entity enters the scenario.

I don't want to give the story away, because although the beginning of this story started a little light, it really picks up at the end as the Captain, her boyfriend and the rest of the crew face off against a deadly entity to try and save not only themselves, but the galaxy. Worth the read!

The Darklady – Scott Moon – 4/5 – I have to admit that at times I was a little lost with this story as it unfolded, but I stuck with it, and I was very glad I did. It does get a little confusing in parts, but it is definitely worth the read.

It follows a crew as they are moving through space on a ship called the 'Darklady'. The ship is unusual in that it runs not just on normal power, but it can sense and then run on dark matter. The Captain of the ship, Jena Morrison-Diablo is sort of on her own, apart from a semi-organic android, Greg. The story unfolds as the ship heads to the Klekamac system, and without giving the entire thing away, as it unfolds, it becomes clear as to the purpose of the initial story, the ship, and the Captain. What unfolds is a rather amazing tale, full of intrigue, some fascinating aliens and some amazing technology. This had a slow start, but was really worth it overall.

Triaxial – Stephen Moss – 4.5/5 – After the 'Lost Sister', an alien starship, parks itself in orbit near the moon, research finds a planet for first contact half way across the galaxy. A crew is selected to travel to this location, with researchers and ambassadors etc. The story unfolds with the ship reaching the planet and finding something incredible, and making first contact. There is the initial first contact with a fascinating species, and the Author does a brilliant job of describing this, the human/alien interaction, the back drop that they are living in, as well as how his main characters respond to it all. I don't want to give it away, as it is a brilliant adventure, and after first contact there is another adventure that adds an extra element to this story.

This is a really great example of Sci-Fi adventure story and a fantastic read.

Harbinger – Josh Hayes – 4.5/5 – This story starts off focussing around a classified bit of technology – ‘babel’, which is actually a catatonic psychic locked in a coffin type tube that can connect with different Alien races and hopefully translate their language and vice versa, allowing for communication in First Contact scenarios. Initially there seems to be some controversy about this ‘new’ technology, the morality and ethics, and the poor ‘allegedly’ living being in the coffin.

As the story progresses though, it takes a bit of a different path, becoming more of a first contact scenario, and, without giving it all away, ends with a sensational twist. Harbinger is a very clever and creative short story, with multiple different paths, with ethics and morality, to ship warfare and first contact, that interweave masterfully to bring us to a brilliant conclusion. Outstanding read.

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## **Mike Crate says**

Explorations: First Contact is a shared universe anthology centered around the human race and their first contact with alien life and associated wonders within the universe. The first story in the anthology is called Prologue written by Stephen Moss and provides the core element the other stories are built around.

Sometime in the near future the spacecraft Abeona orbits the moon and approaches an alien sphere shaped artefact recently discovered on the dark side. As they near the sphere mission commander Susan Skarsgaard finds herself floating in space with no sign of her ship or crew and then an assault of images and information floods her mind including one very clear and ominous warning.

Well there we go, the sphere and its effect on humanity and their expansion into space provides a very well thought out structure for authors to build first contact stories around them. You'll find a wide range of styles and approaches to the concept and not all of them go well for humanity and of course the warning is always casting a long shadow as we spread out into the galaxy.

I do enjoy reading these anthologies, they tend to be cheap as they are very much promotional tools for the authors involved and I have certainly followed an author after first reading their work in this type of publication. A recommended read for any science fiction fan.

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