

Characters

Tilda (M/F) - A scientist.

Dax (M/F) - Tilda's friend.

Scene 1 - Observatory

(A radio telescope space observatory. At least two or more computers with chairs should be on stage. Additional electronic-looking gadgetry may be strewn about. Lights and SFX. electronic sounds should be added. At rise, Tilda enters the room as if opening a door and letting Dax in. Tilda carries a lunch basket and a box of cookies. SFX. Various low-level electronic sounds are heard.)

Tilda: Here we are!

Dax: **(enters the room and looks around in amazement)** Wow! This is amazing: the lights, the electronics, the computers. I can't believe you finally brought me here to see this. It's fantastic!

Tilda: One enormous electronic ear - without the wax.

Dax: This is what they use to listen to space? All this stuff?

Tilda: Yup. It scans through every region of space, traps signals, and analyses them.

Dax: What kind of signals?

Tilda: Mostly radio signals.

Dax: Broadcasts of baseball games on other planets?

Tilda: Something like that.

(SFX. a loud beeping sound is heard.)

Dax: What was that?

Tilda: Oh, that. The computer makes a sound whenever it finds an anomaly. Usually it's nothing and everyone just ignores it. The data is analysed later and if anything comes up that is difficult to explain it gets flagged for further study. Can you believe that a signal once thought to be an alien transmission in another observatory turned out to originate from the microwave oven in their break room? It caused quite a stir.

Dax: Microwaves need friends too, apparently.

Tilda: What you don't want to hear is a sound emanating from that klaxon horn way up there. **(points)**

Dax: Why? What does that mean?

Tilda: It only goes off when the computer detects an imminent danger.

Dax: Imminent danger?

Tilda: Yeah, like when an asteroid is about to crash into us or a UFO takes a wrong turn or something like that.

Dax: War of the Worlds stuff?

Tilda: **(shrugs her shoulder)** You never know. **(pause)** Most of the time it's usually pretty quiet here.

(SFX. loud beep is heard. Dax is a little startled.)

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Tilda: Relax. If a serious signal is confirmed the place will be swarming with scientists and technicians. Everyone wants to be the first to be here.

Dax: **(pause)** Must be rather boring just sitting around waiting for a phone call from far away aliens. Maybe you should send out signals that say: "For a good time, call..."

Tilda: We would but we're having trouble finding the galactic urinals. **(pause)** Hey! I brought cookies. **(puts her cookies on the table)**

Dax: **(rushes over to the table)** Oooh! Are those the thumbprint cookies you grandmother makes?

Tilda: Yeah.

Dax: Oh, I love those cookies with the crushed nuts on the outside and dollops of chocolate or jelly squeezed into the impression at the top. I better wait until after lunch to have some though, or I won't eat anything else.

Tilda: And here I thought pounds of butter, sugar, and cocoa *was* lunch.

Dax: Well, maybe just one. **(guiltily grabs a cookie and eats it)** You don't really worry about alien invasions do you?

Tilda: **(laughs)** No. Around here we're more concerned about losing funding.

Dax: Funding?

Tilda: Everytime there's a new administration we have to worry about whether or not they will support this program.

Dax: So, for example if...

(SFX. loud extended beep is heard)

Tilda: Don't!

Dax: Don't what?

Tilda: Don't say that name here.

Dax: What? You mean...

(SFX. two loud beeps are heard)

Tilda: Yes, that name! We do not speak that name here.

Dax: Because if... **(pauses to look cautiously around the room)** the-very-opinionated-politician-who-shall-not-be-named gets elected, they might cut your funding?

Tilda: That's right.

Dax: Maybe we should send one of those attack UFOs to their house.

Tilda: If only...

(SFX. A repeated beeping sound is heard.)

Dax: What did I say?

Tilda: **(running toward a computer)** The computer has detected a sustained anomaly.

Dax: A what?

Tilda: A signal that the computer has determined is more than a random event.

Dax: **(runs to the computer)** First contact?

Tilda: (stares at the screen) Maybe.

Dax: (looking closer) It just looks like a bunch of numbers.

Tilda: Well you can't expect them to be able to write English. We send out coded signals in the hopes something will understand and respond. Not every civilisation will understand letters but any intelligent species will understand the concept of numbers. The numbers, in turn, form shapes. I just have to program the computer to interpret the message.

Dax: Shouldn't we let the others know? I mean, this could be one of the greatest scientific discoveries of our age.

Tilda: I just want to be sure it's not a mistake. I don't want to have to explain that our microwave is sending out pen pal messages or that we are just getting reruns of *I Love Lucy* bouncing back from some asteroid.

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Dax: (stares intently at the screen) What's happening?

Tilda: Nothing yet. The computer is processing the information and turning it into images. (an aside) They must be relatively close for the message to be coming in so fast. (pause) Wait! Something's coming up.

(Tilda and Dax point and stare at the computer screen. They speak as if images are slowly developed on the screen.)

Dax: What is that?

Tilda: It's rectangular... surrounded by other oblong shapes.

Dax: The shapes are changing... getting closer.

Tilda: (slowly) It looks like some kind of barrier.

Dax: (slowly) But with openings to the other side.

Tilda: Not a barrier... a portal?

Dax: More like a door. But to what? Another part of the galaxy? Another world? Another dimension?

Tilda: **(points to the screen)** Wait! Something's happening... there!

Dax: It looks like... No, it can't be. Like a stick figure? A human stick figure? How is that possible?

Tilda: The Arecibo radio message had a human stick figure in it.

Dax: The what?

Tilda: The Arecibo message was a radio signal sent from Earth in 1974. It was meant to be a coded transmission that portrayed simple graphics depicting us and our achievements. One of those images was a human stick figure.

Dax: So that represents us?

Tilda: Maybe.

Dax: **(a little excited)** The figure is... moving?

Tilda: **(also excited)** Yes. **(pause)** It's approaching the doorway.

Dax: Look! The doorway is opening!

Tilda: **(gasps)** Oh... my...

Dax: We have to tell someone about this!

Tilda: No, wait! Not yet. I want to see what's on the other side of that door.

(Tilda and Dax slowly lean in closer to the screen until suddenly and at once both jump back in surprise. They look at each other.)

Dax: What was that?

Tilda: It looked like... No. That makes no sense.

Dax: It looked like the barrier suddenly interrupted the movement of the stick figure as if...

Tilda: As if the door got slammed in its face?

Dax: What do you think it means?

Tilda: What does it usually mean when the door gets slammed in your face?

Dax: Go away?

Tilda: I think we just saw the intergalactic counterpart of a No Solicitors sign. Maybe they have been getting our messages all this time and just aren't interested in responding. Maybe we're the equivalent of an interstellar religious sect constantly coming to the front door with pamphlets.

Dax: And they just put up a sign that says *Do Not Disturb*.

Tilda: We assume that any life form out there would naturally be interested in us and want to talk to us.

Dax: Instead, they just want to be left alone.

Tilda: Maybe they've taken a look at us and decided our self-destructive, violent, and controlling nature wasn't worth a return call.

Dax: **(pause)** We have to tell someone.

Tilda: No! We need to respect their wishes.

Dax: But this could be the most important scientific discovery of all time. You could be famous. The world could be transformed by new information, new knowledge, new relationships!

Tilda: Or the world could be destroyed!

Dax: **(shocked)** Destroyed? What do you mean?

Tilda: Think about it! You're sitting quietly at home when the well-dressed members of the Holy Order of Arrogance and Hypocrisy come ring your doorbell. You get up out of your comfy armchair and politely tell the well-mannered but rude interlopers that they should kindly go on their way and not come back. But they do come back. Again and again and again all the while insisting that you listen to their message. **(pause)** What would you do? Let them in? Apologise for not considering a perspective that makes no sense to you and your way of life? Offer them a cup of tea as they convince you of their obvious righteousness? Sign up for one of their classes?

Dax: No, I wouldn't. I'd probably put a shotgun in their faces and tell them not to return.

Tilda: Exactly!

Dax: So, what do we do now? You can't just let this historic opportunity go by and bringing in more people is just going to annoy them even more.

Tilda: **(thinking)** Yeah, you're right. We need to do this ourselves. Once all the PhDs and brass get in here there will be no subtlety left. **(picks up a pencil)** We just need the right message.

Dax: OK. Let's figure this out.

(grabs a nearby folder and hands it to Tilda)

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Dax: Here. Now hold this up like a door.

(Moves Tilda's hands so that the folder is between them)

Dax: OK. I come knocking on your door. **(raps on the folder)** You open the door

(Tilda moves the folder as if opening a door)

Dax: and I say, "Hi, I'm from the Sacred Temple of the Pretentiously Pious and I've come to spread our message of intolerance." What do you do?

(Tilda slams the folder into Dax's face. Dax gently pushes the folder away.)

Dax: Right! You slam the door in my face.

Tilda: You have another approach?

Dax: OK... How about...

(Takes Tilda's hand and places the folder between them again and then knocks on the folder)

Dax: Hello? My family's intergalactic vehicle broke down just a few light years away from here and I was wondering if you might help us out?

(Once again, Tilda slams the folder into Dax's face. Dax gently pushes the folder aside.)

Tilda: Don't be ridiculous. They're not going to help some little planet out and will probably just think it's a trick anyway.

Dax: We could say they've won a grand prize sweepstake.

(Tilda smacks Dax in the face with the folder.)

Dax: Offer them a tour of Disneyworld?

(Tilda almost smacks Dax again but stops)

Tilda: Wait a minute. That might work.

Dax: What, putting aliens on Space Mountain?

Tilda: No, but maybe showing them images of some of the beautiful places on this planet would catch their attention. They might take an interest in us. Let's give it a try. What could we send them? **(walks to computer)**

Dax: **(follows her)** How about Niagara Falls?

Tilda: Niagara Falls. That's good: falling water, rocks, trees, misty sunshine. That should pique their interest. **(taps on computer)** I just need to encode it... **(taps away)** and then send it. **(ceremoniously hits one more button)**

Dax: Then?

Tilda: Then we wait.

(They wait for a few moments. Dax eyes the cookies then eventually walks over toward them but before he can take one, SFX. the sound of a large klaxon horn is heard. Flashing lights might also go off.)

Dax: **(holding his ears)** What the hell is that?

Tilda: The shotgun! The computer is detecting a possible threat. Within 30 minutes we'll have half the military and NASA in here.

Dax: What do we do in the meantime?

Tilda: See if we can get them to open the door again.

Dax: How?

Tilda: (starts typing) I'm sending another message with images that say "We mean you no harm."

(Tilda stops typing and then they both wait but nothing changes.)

Dax: Nothing happened. Try something like "We come in peace."

Tilda: OK.

(Tilda types on the keyboard again. They wait. Nothing changes.)

Dax: Are we doomed?

Tilda: I'm going to try one more message and then we're going to run for our lives.

(Once again Tilda types on the keyboard and sends a message. They wait. After a moment the klaxon horn stops. They look at each other and hug.)

Dax: You did it, you did it!

Tilda: Thank goodness. But, we should still get out of here. The place is going to be crawling with uniforms and lab coats soon and I don't really want to try and explain what just happened.

Dax: Yeah, you're right. C'mon.

(Dax and Tilda head toward the exit.)

Dax: Hey, what was the message you sent them?

Tilda: "We have cookies."

Dax: Cookies! I almost forgot. (heads toward cookies)

Tilda: (stops him) Leave them!

(Dax and Tilda head toward offstage to exit. Tilda flicks a switch as if turning off the lights. The lights fade and they exit. SFX. Strange sounds are heard. A light directly above the cookies fades in then fades out as the strange sounds diminish. Fade to black.)

Curtain