

Futures

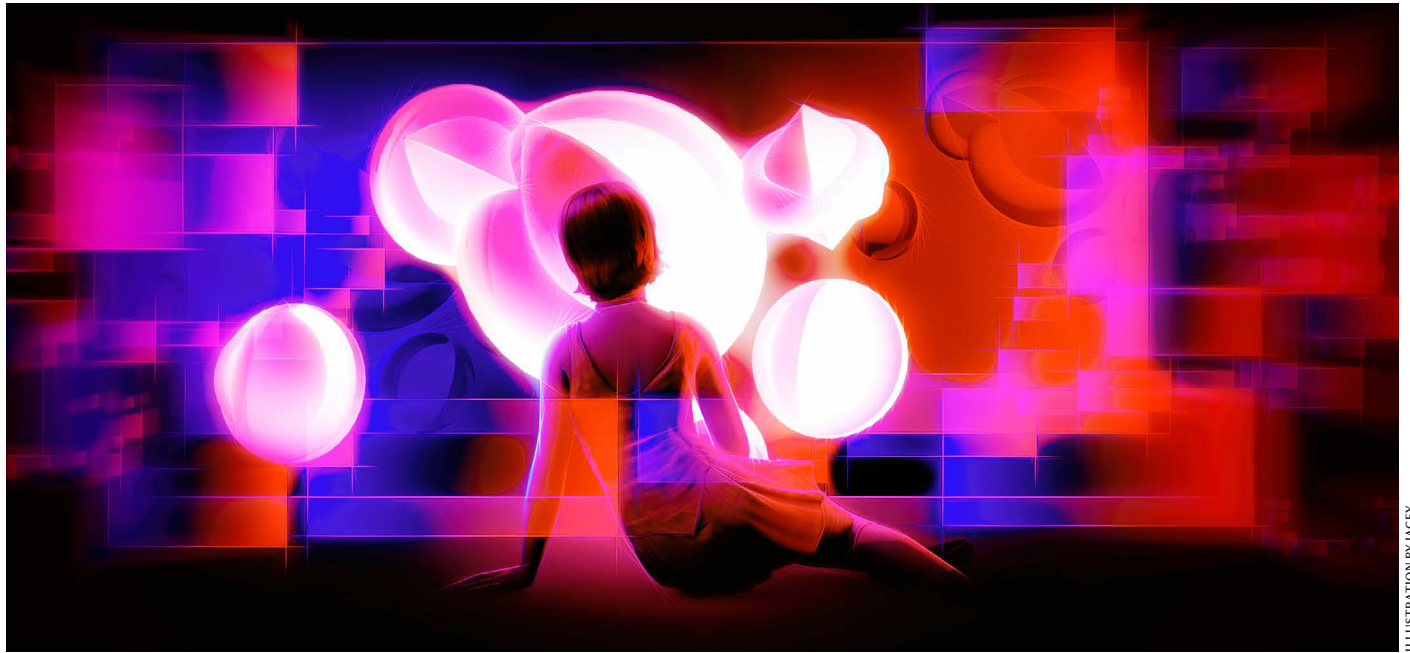


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

Family album

Meet the ancestors. By Marissa Lingen

It had been more than 50 years since any world leader but the Canadian prime minister had any reason to think of St Paul, Alberta – and even he was likely to think of it as the hometown of hockey player Kyle Brodziak. So there were a lot of frantic briefings on the night of 14 August 2024 (Greenwich Mean Time) – and then a lot of aides sent back in incredulity just to check again.

It was eccentric enough that the little town in east-central Alberta, tumbleweed and Herefords, had taken stones from all over Canada to build a UFO landing pad in 1967.

What was stranger was that eventually aliens had *used* it.

Not a flying saucer per se, but not the farthest thing from it – a very decorous little box with rounded edges and discrete glows from the UV through the yellow part of the spectrum had plunked itself down neatly where indicated, two blocks from Annie Leonard's grocery. And its multi-limbed passengers had disembarked on the extremely flat black asphalt of St Paul.

With no request forthcoming to take them to our leaders, Earth's actual leaders – or, at least, the people heading our states – had tripped and scrambled and swore and jostled

for precedence – jets into Edmonton and then helicopters into St Paul – to be taken to *them*.

But even the Canadian PM was too late.

"They ain't here," said Annie Leonard, shaking her head and rolling her eyes at the incomprehensibility of world leaders jostling their way through her door.

"What do you *mean* they're not here? What did you *say* to them?" demanded the Canadian chief of staff, far more prone to saying things that made people decamp than Annie Leonard had ever been.

"*Me?* God bless, I didn't say nothing, it was that little Nevaeh Addair, she welcomed them real pretty, Nev's a nice kid. Told 'em all the stuff you can see and do in Alberta – you'd be proud, pee em," she said to the prime minister, for whom she felt no small amount of ownership, having failed to vote for him in three successive elections. Besides, she knew who he was, which was true of only two of the others. She peered curiously at the mob of security spilling out into the street, the most secure St Paul had ever been, and the least comfortable.

"They can't have gone *home*," said the prime minister, feeling the crush of the other world leaders breathing down his neck. "Their ship's

still here. They've only just arrived."

"No, I told you. Nev took 'em to that big museum that they take the kids to with school. In Drumheller."

Out went the security details and up went the helicopters, and the prime minister gave silent thanks that if first contact with another sentient race was happening for the first time in Alberta, it was not during a blizzard, a forest fire in the Rockies, or a Flames/Oilers game. He was not sure interstellar relations could have withstood it, but international air traffic certainly could not.

There, on the concourse of the world's largest fossil museum, he straightened his hair, artfully re-rumpled it again, trying to get the beginning of his speech just right – no Neil Armstrong word omissions for him. Historic. Dignified. Polite. Canadian.

He stepped into the main fossil hall and found three staggeringly orange, eight-limbed, bison-sized aliens hunkered around the *Albertosaurus* skeletons. In their midst sat a black-haired Metis girl with green extensions, cross-legged on the floor.

She beamed at him. "Oh hi! The Torolans wanted to see where we honour our ancestors, so I thought I'd introduce them!"

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“Nev says this is why the welcome mat is here,” rumbled one of the orange bison-spiders in a voice that surely – *surely*, thought the prime minister – came from a mechanical translation box. “Because there are so many ancestors! So many! We honour your resemblance!”

“Ah –” said the prime minister of Canada, who had never before been told that he looked like an *Albertosaur*. “I –”

“Thank you!” said Nev Addair. She gave the prime minister a look familiar from his own childhood, a ... prompt.

“Thank you, we are quite proud of the, uh, the ancestors,” was the first official speech from a human leader to an alien. “And, ah, our notable. Notable resemblance. Yes. Quite proud.”

There was an ominous spate of clacking among the aliens, and then the same rumble said, “We will bring our own collections of memory stones to share next time, but come! Let us show you images of *our* ancestors! We will take the time to do this properly!”

“Oh good,” was the second official speech from a human leader, as the prime minister sank to the floor next to Nev Addair, who grinned at

him like she was at the best birthday party ever. A device in one of the aliens’ appendages lit and projected on the wall beside them.

“Seven hundred million of your Earth years ago, we have seen evidence of life in our warmer liquids – Junior Officer, refocus that imaging device!”

Marissa Lingen has published more than 100 short stories in venues such as *Analog*, *Lightspeed* and *Tor.com*.