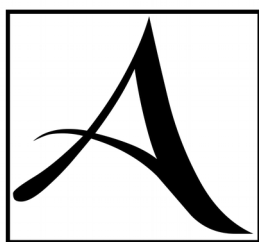


**P.R.O.B.E.**

***SHE CAME FROM  
ANOTHER WORLD!***

**A PREQUEL OF CHILLS AND THRILLS IN 4-D TECHNICOLOR  
BY JAMES WYLDER**



People were out to watch the shooting star, but Giles was just trying to catch it. Normally one of the other organizations would take this sort of job, it's not like there was a shortage of options, but he was the closest by a longshot.

And it was supposed to have been a holiday.

He pressed down on the accelerator as he came out of a turn. He wouldn't quite catch up, but he'd be there quick enough if it was anything funny, there'd at least be a witness. The shooting star, which hadn't been predicted by any astronomer, impacted in the forest just ahead of him. It didn't sound like a rock hitting the ground, it sounded like a slow motion car-crash: metal ripping, crumbling in on itself, mechanical parts working themselves to ribbons.

So not a shooting star, and not a holiday anymore.

He drove down the forest path, till he got to where the smoke was rising up from the trees, and squealed to a halt. He barely remembered to grab his sidearm as he scampered out.

He'd heard stories, read reports, but P.R.O.B.E usually dealt with a...different sort of otherworldly than this. He'd never actually seen a spaceship before, but that's clearly what it was. It was a dark shiny black, and if it hadn't been for the damage and kicked up dirt would have been nearly a mirror. The ship had broken part of its tail off during the landing, if you could call that a landing, and little metal arms were reaching out from the rest of the hulk, straining to reach the tail of the ship and pull it back. The front of the ship began giggling. He turned, edging towards it, and startled as what must have been the top of the cockpit shot up on a hinge, and a big duffle bag flew out, landing on the leaves just outside it. It hadn't been thrown far. Following it, came a young woman. Maybe? At least it looked like a young woman to his first assumption. She was wearing a grey poncho over a white blouse and pants, with study boots on her feet. A big satchel was slung over her shoulder. On her head were heavy-duty goggles, ontop her vibrant purple hair which was tied back in a long ponytail. At first, he thought, it wasn't an alien at all, she was a test pilot. False alarm, but glad he could pick her up. The military never gave them notice of these things till after the fact, a good story till later.

Then she turned around.

She had white skin, not Caucasian but actually white, and the eyes that looked at him with deep terror and surprise were purple too. But it was the cut on her cheek that rubbed it in.

The blood there was purple, and as it kept oozing down her face, it was still purple.

She stood there like a deer in headlights for a moment, and then took a step back.

Reflexively, he raised the sidearm, and she crumpled to her knees, putting her hands on either cheek facing out, elbows wide and to the sides.

She was tearing up, and began...singing? It took Giles a moment to realize she wasn't singing, she was speaking, but whatever language she spoke it sounded like song.

"Do you know English?" He called out.

She sung back at him.

He tried a few other languages, but to every one she just half-sobbed song back at him. This was getting him nowhere. If this girl was a threat then he'd be willing to die wrong. He lowered the gun, and holstered it. Then placed his hands out, palms forward (at least this

alien looked NEARLY human, so body language had to get him somewhere).

“Not gonna hurt you, you’re alright,” he overdid the tone, hoping it came across.

Slowly, she lowered her hands, and whimpered a melody. He walked closer, and held a hand out to her. She looked at it for a second, then reached up to take it and he pulled her to her feet. Finally face to face, the alienness was more obvious. He could see purple veins beneath the skin. The bones were...slightly off in ways he couldn’t quite place. She seemed to be inspecting him too.”

Finally, she put a finger to her chest and said,

“Maxiassa.”

“Max-Ay-Ussa.”

“Max-ee-ah-suh.”

“Maxiassa.”

She smiled. Good! Well, if smiling was good with her species. He put a finger on his own chest.

“Giles.”

“Gee-lays.”

“Jai-ells.”

“Giles!”

He smiled back. And pointed at her pony tail and then his.

“Oh, hey I guess we have that in common.”

She nodded as if she’d understood him, and then seemed to remember something and scrambled backwards, almost tackling her duffle bag, and pulling it up, wrapping both her arms around it. She tilted her head and sung something at him.

He was about to respond, when the loud screech came. It tore through the breeze, and next to the ship, there was a glitch in the air. It seemed to pixelate and rip, and through it stepped...something. Whenever Giles looked at it, it looked like corrupted video on a computer, mixed with the visual tearing on an old VHS tape. Bits of it seemed to flicker left and right, its colors changed in a headache inducing chaos. But through all of it, it was vaguely the shape of a person.

“Mar’tuth,” Maxiassa said, stumbling backwards.

Then it reached a hand out, and the ship seemed to glitch too.

Maxiassa pulled on Giles arm, tugging him back as she broke into a run. He trusted her judgment, and sprinted after her. This chose to be a good decision, as momentarily after, the ship exploded in a column of fire. Giles flew forward, tumbling into leaves and shrubs face down. His body ached, he could hear the glitching thing behind them (Mar’tuth?). It was then that the really important moment happened, the one that changed everything. Because Maxiassa, still clutching her duffle bag, looked down at him. He could see the look in her eyes, she was terrified. She could leave him there. Run. Let him be a speedbump in her escape. But she forced past it, and reached down to pull him up.

“Gee-lay, Gee-lay! Mee-ah hee-uu ay-ay!” she sung, dragging him to his feet.

She was not very strong, but she heaved all she could, trying to pull him forward even though it was a lost cause, till Giles' head cleared, and he began to move his legs on his own.

And then, just as quickly he was pulling her along instead, to the left instead of her right, towards the car. He yanked the door open, and she stared at it. So he pulled the passenger door open and she threw her bag in and jumped after it as he slammed the door behind her, and slid into the driver's seat.

This was far more adventure than he usually got in one day.

He maxed out the accelerator, and checked in the rear-view mirror so see Mar'tuth following them, but...then it swerved off the road, following them to the side, staying out of the mirror view even though it slowed them down. Maxiassa was shaking and crying, peering over the backseat at the glitching thing, then she glanced back at the rear-view mirror. He swerved, and she dropped hard onto the seat, but she sat up, reached into her satchel, and pulled out a compact mirror. She held it up to face the glitch thing, and it dodged away from direct view of the mirror. Maxiassa scrambled in between the seats, pointing at her mirror, then spreading her arms wide, then getting thrown backwards again into the seat.

"I think I know what you're trying to say," Giles said through gritted teeth. "We're making a stop at Homestyle."

The security cameras at Homestyle all malfunctioned at 9PM that day, suffering complete software corruption. If they had been working, they would have seen a car skid to a halt in front of the store, and two people, one of whom looked like they were out of a sci-fi serial, jump out. They ran into the store, and a thing followed them. The pair pushed past customers, and employees, scanning the aisle names till Giles saw it, and pointed. Maxiassa nodded. They ran down the aisle, and Mar'tuth followed.

The glitch turned the corner, and made a terrible squealing sound. At the end of the aisle stood Giles, holding a mirror, in an aisle that hung with mirrors of all sizes, small ones on shelves, big ones on hangers. Mar'tuth tried to turn, but their target was there, holding a full length mirror.

It's corruption tried to spread out of it, but it bounced back. The glitches tore at itself, crumbling its own body away, till it fell to the floor in a tumble of blocky dust.

They both lowered their mirrors, and came in close to look at the dust. Giles nudged it with his foot. It was gone.

"Zia Miat!" Maxiassa cried out, throwing her arms into the air in triumph.

"Yeah, Zia Miat," he replied with a smirk.

As their survival sunk in, in the mirror department at Homestyle, Giles finally had time to wonder how this girl was going to get home.

\* \* \*

### ***Two months later***

Maxiassa shut the copy of "Wuthering Heights", a puzzled look on her face.

"It's puzzling to me, why Catherine didn't just marry Linton and Heathcliff," she said in a thick sing-song accent.

Giles shrugged, "A lot of places look down on that sort of thing on Earth."

"Bizarre. It's very marriage," she replied.

"Well, not quite a correct sentence but you've really made quick progress with English."

The secretary coughed, "Sir Andrew Williams will see you now."

He smiled at Maxiassa, and she gave a nervous nod and rose up, pulling out her compact to check her looks again. The brown contacts completely covered her irises, which she'd always thought were a particularly lovely shade of purple. Her hair was now a dyed brown too, and a layer of make up over all of her visible skin made her look stunningly human. It was disconcerting. But what choice did she have? Shutting it, and shoving it in her "purse" (a sort of small satchel many women here had in lieu of pockets which seemed a bit silly, but she was adapting) she rose to go and meet the man who would determine her fate.

"Ah, Giles, so this is the lady in question."

She didn't know what to do, she'd rehearsed this but her mind was drawing a blank so she just panicked and gave a quick bow before sitting down in the chair Sir Williams pulled out for her.

"I'm really sorry to come here for a favor--"

Sir Williams held a hand up and shook his head, "I think we can skip with all that. You know I'm more than happy to hear you out."

Maxiassa looked up at the big paintings on the wall, old humans in their traditional dress clothes. She was wearing one for women here, which for some reason left her legs bare beneath a long skirt.

Why?

She pursed her lips. She'd just have to get used to it.

"Maxine here, or rather, that's what we're calling her, is a political refugee.

Unfortunately, the circumstances of her immigration to the UK were...unusual. She has no papers, or documentation of any sort she even exists. Also, other agencies outside P.R.O.B.E that deal in similar matters have recommended extradition, or at the very least refusal of asylum."

Sir Williams furrowed his brow.

"But she's also just a civilian, no military training or experience."

"Well, where did she come from?"

Giles sighed, "I'm afraid that's classified."

"Well, what can you tell me?"

There was a moment of silence, and Maxiassa felt the fear run up her spine. She couldn't go back. She...She...She was...

*She was running, they were chasing her through the stone halls. She hadn't meant to see it, she hadn't known. She'd just been scouting things out before the next group arrived. Why was this happening? A bolt of energy raced by her head and she screamed, they were trying to kill her! Just like they'd murdered Tiassia just for being here! They were--*

She took a deep breath, she let it out. She clenched the notebook in front of her hard.

There were shakes in her hands. She had to do this. She took a deep breath, and let it out. The room was around her again, spinning a bit but there. She could hear words, but...

“Hello,” she began awkwardly, her sing-song accent becoming even more noticeable to her in front of Sir Williams, “I am Maxine Masters. I was a tour guide in my homeland. During preparations for a tour--

*They ran after her. They hunted her. Her blood pounded.*

“I stumbled into a meeting I was not supposed to hear with a friend who...was killed. I fled, only having enough time to stuff a bag full of my things and leave.”

*The sound of their boots, the taunting cries, the blood on her from Tiassa, this job was supposed to be fun for them both, getting to work together, and now her blood was...*

She realized she was not really in control. She wasn't looking at Sir Williams, just at her hands which had crumbled the cover of the notebook. She could feel her eyes watering.

“Mr. Giles says I can be useful, and you may be able to give me protection in return. I would be most grateful if you were to oblige him.” The whole thing came out between sobs, awkwardly. And by the time she was finished she knew she shouldn't have spoken up. She'd be sent back, cause of her embarrassing voice, her lack of composure. But...there was a hand in front of her face, in between her eyes and the crumpled notebook. It held a white cloth.

“Please, miss, you may take it.”

She grabbed the cloth, and looked over at Giles. He mimed wiping her eyes and nose. OHHH.

She blotted her tears, and blew her nose.

“I am very most thankful,” she said. “For the cloth.”

“I see the young lady has really been through an ordeal,” he placed a hand on her shoulder, squeezed it, and returned behind his desk. “From what she said, I assume you were thinking she could join P.R.O.B.E in exchange for asylum?”

“Yes sir, and I was hoping that might be enough for you to pull strings to make it happen.”

He stroked his chin, “This is the sort of thing I've always admired about you Giles, why I was pleased you were given P.R.O.B.E. I don't see how the United Kingdom could turn their back on this young lady, so you have my word: I will make sure she is given asylum here.”

Maxiassa rose, and gave a deep bow, “Thank you, Mister Sir Andrew Williams.”

He smiled, “Just be sure to do your best for us.”

\* \* \*

Maxiassa, or now Maxine, adjusted the painting on the wall. She didn't know who painted it, but she liked the look of it. Swirling blues and yellow stars forming a night sky. It

made her think of home. She shook her head.

This was home.

She could never go back. Never see her mothers and fathers, her siblings, her friends...never even be herself. She'd laid out everything she'd managed to throw in her bag on the table she'd had moved in. It wasn't much, but she felt grateful she'd been able to grab her computer at least. She had a fairly decent amount of movies, shows, and music from Gendar on there but...it wasn't enough. She was already cursing herself for not downloading certain things she cared about. This was all there was, all there ever would be. There was a knock on the door, and she looked through the peephole before opening it, unlatching, unbolting, and unlocking the door.

"Mr. Giles!"

"Just Giles, how has the move in gone?"

She led him inside, and went to make him a cup of tea, which was at least a tradition Gendar and England seemed to share. As she brought it over, she saw he had set a device on the coffee table.

"Why do you have a trio-disregulator?"

"Turn it on for me."

"I can't, it's broken."

"Can you fix it?"

She frowned, but picked it up, walked over to a cabinet, and got the cheap set of tools she'd gotten for the apartment. Prying it open, she rearranged the circuitry, adjusted the dispassion module, and powered it on. She stood there, befuddled.

"Now what do you do with it?"

"Well nothing right now unless we were doing laundry."

A big grin appeared on his face, "That's how you're going to help me Maxine, you'll take on the role I had in P.R.O.B.E as technician."

"But, Mr. Giles, I am not a technician. I...sir I didn't go to university on my homeworld. I didn't get good enough grades for that. I'm not...talented."

"But you know how to fix that."

She looked down at it, "A child could fix that."

"A team of scientists worked five years and wasn't able to fix that. Maybe you don't think you're skilled, but you have skills we don't have. You can help us at P.R.O.B.E a lot, and do some real good."

She put on a fake smile, she wasn't sure he was right, but this human had yet to do her wrong, "Thank you, I accept the position,"

After Giles had left, she put the device in her laundry room, and went to get ready for bed. She looked at herself in the bathroom mirror, and pulled out her contacts for the night. Purple eyes stared back, brilliant and hers.

"I'm still here," she told herself, "despite everything, I'm still here."

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