

The Starchild Skull

Also by Lloyd Pye

THAT PROSSER KID (1977)

MISMATCH (1987)

EVERYTHING YOU KNOW IS WRONG (1997)

The Starchild Skull

Genetic Enigma or . . .

Human-Alien Hybrid?

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Lloyd Pye

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Bell Lap Books Inc.
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For information contact:
Bell Lap Books Inc.
38 S. Blue Angel Pkwy
Suite 210
Pensacola, FL 32506
www.bellapbooks.com

ISBN 10: 0-9793881-0-4

ISBN 13: 978-0-9793881-0-1

Printed in the United States of America

DEDICATION

To my mother, Nina (Boyles) Pye, who died giving me birth, and who has gone on to live a full and productive life as a wife, mother, and supporter of many charitable causes.

And to my new wife, Amy, who birthed me in a very different way, and with whom I have finally become an adult.

IN MEMORIAM

To Cheyenne Turner, whose kindness and generosity of spirit enabled me to begin my career as a platform speaker in Dallas on a cold January evening in 1998.

And to Teri Brown, who features prominently in the pages of this book because she and her husband Bob had pivotal roles in providing the Starchild skull with its first exposure to the alternative knowledge community.

Cheyenne and Teri were close friends in life. They were outstanding leaders in our field, and powerful advocates for exposing hidden or suppressed truths. They are missed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Eight years is a long stretch on anybody's calendar, so a full listing of those who have helped the Starchild's progress during that time would run several pages long. Suffice it to say that nearly all of the major players are featured or mentioned at some point in the text of this book. The many others who contributed along the way, with either financial or emotional support, know who they are. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge them, and to tell them I deeply appreciate their contributions, more than they know. I wish I could mention everyone, but the practicalities of publishing make that impossible. So to each of you I offer the wise and wonderful words of William Shakespeare:

I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks.

PREFACE

All great truths begin as blasphemies.

George Bernard Shaw

Indeed they do. Consequently, many people will consider this book a blasphemy because it outlines a probable—not just a possible, a *probable*—truth that is glaringly at odds with certain powerful convictions of mainstream science, religions, and governments. When that triumvirate stands with arms linked against a new idea, even if that idea bristles with credibility, it will struggle to gain the triumvirate’s recognition, much less be taken seriously by any part of it.

For eight years, Starchild Project members have struggled to get this remarkable skull recognized and taken seriously by a scientific community loathe to granting even a sliver of credibility to ideas lacking their official sanction. Skepticism is prompt and pervasive, not just for the usual excuse of winnowing out the all-too-frequent bogus claims, but to avoid having to challenge their own cherished beliefs.

This book challenges many cherished beliefs of science, religions, and governments, although government positions are more assertions than beliefs. Governments are aware of many things they don’t share with those governed, and they all work diligently to maintain their secrets. Religion takes the easier route of wrapping itself in a nimbus of faith that simply excludes whatever conflicts with its various dogmas.

In this unique quest for the truth about the Starchild skull, governments and religions have largely become bystanders. Interested bystanders, to be sure, but bystanders all the same. Because the Starchild is so ripe with potential to change history, and so solidly documented, science must be—and must remain—at the forefront until the issue is resolved, one way or the other, up or down, win or lose.

Throughout the text of this book, 64 illustrations are placed as near as possible to where they optimally should appear in the natural flow of events. Each reader is, of course, free to view the photos and/or read their captions at any time, but the book’s impact will be maximized by letting the story—and its many subsequent discoveries—unfold at roughly the same pace they occurred.

Those with the patience and discipline to follow this suggestion will be amply rewarded for their trouble.

Another way to enhance your experience of reading this book is to know that the first two chapters are used to set up the rest of the story. Don't be confused by how the book begins in Chapter One (*Backstory*). It takes you where you need to go, and then leads into Chapter Two (*Provenance*), which further clarifies what is necessary to prepare for understanding and appreciating of the story that later unfolds.

Not every person mentioned in the book will be identified with their real names. Some have made specific requests that their real names not be used. Others do not appear in the most favorable light, yet were, I feel sure, merely doing their jobs with honest intentions, to the best of their ability.

A decade or more of specialized training leaves nearly all "experts" utterly convinced that "natural" solutions are required for absolutely *every* questionable phenomenon. I've come to view their blinkered perception of the world with a degree of sympathy, enough to avoid naming names when it might be hurtful with no other purpose than to be hurtful.

Lastly, any work of this nature must, of necessity, be largely a product of memory supported by notes taken during or after meetings, letters, emails, and other communications that relate to the events depicted. In every case, I have labored to be true to the essence of scenes and events as they occurred. Any errors of fact that might be found are solely my responsibility, and, if brought to my attention (lloyd@lloydpye.com), will be corrected in future editions.

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BACKSTORY

A straight line may be the shortest distance between two points, but it is by no means the most interesting.

Dr. Who

900 YEARS AGO

Her name doesn't matter. We assume she was Raramuri, an ancient tribe of Native Americans known today as the Tarahumara. They lived in northwest Mexico, 100 miles southwest of today's Chihuahua, close to the Copper Canyon, Mexico's version of Arizona's Grand Canyon. The area is high desert, where baking heat is common throughout much of any year.

Everyone in her time and place knew what heat did to corpses, which probably made her think about the abandoned mine tunnel. Its ever-present coolness would have been inviting to a desert dweller as a place to spend eternity. She had a corpse to bury, after which she meant to lie down beside it and die. Choosing her own final resting place, and that of her deceased companion, were not matters she would have taken lightly.

She felt the mine tunnel would be a good choice. When she was a young girl straying far from the village in search of food, she accidentally discovered its entrance, overgrown with brush. It came to be the secret place where, during her childhood, she returned for quiet solace in times of stress. She never spoke about it to anyone, and now, many years later, it would be her final resting place. From there, if the shamans were correct, she would join her deceased family and friends—and be reunited with her beloved.

She crept away well before dawn, so no one in the village would know which direction she took. Along worn paths between arid ravines she went high into the hills surrounding the village. She carried the frail corpse across both arms, always amazed at the lightness of her beloved. A child the same size would easily weigh twice as much. This was like carrying a dried gourd instead of a melon. Even so, in the morning murk she broke a heavy sweat, reaching the tunnel just as the top of the sun cleared the horizon.

She paused to fully absorb it . . . the bright orange orb to the east, the nearly full shimmering moon to the west . . . the last she would see of either.

The tunnel's bramble-shrouded entrance was midway up a ravine wall, which meant a struggle to get up to it, cradling even a light corpse. Breathing hard, she gingerly shoved prickles away until she could finally gaze inside. She hadn't been there since. . . . She couldn't recall. Too many years had passed. She was glad to see it was as she remembered, and, not for the first time that day, tears of grief and remembrance stung her weary eyes.

As always, the overgrowth couldn't stop the barely risen sun from illuminating the main shaft well beyond the entrance. She was able to carry her charge fifty paces before losing too much light to take a secure next step. She lay her burden down and sat beside it to rest, letting her eyes fully adjust to the enveloping dimness. By the time her breathing normalized, she could see as during a half-moon night, more than enough for what she had to do.

Choosing the tunnel had been driven by instinct and faded memory, but once inside, she realized it was ideal for her needs. People from her village would search for her, but they could only locate the opening if they chose the correct ravine, which was one among hundreds, and then noticed her tracks leading up into the brush covering its entrance. That didn't seem likely unless she was incredibly unlucky.

More important for her peace of mind was that scavengers weren't likely to find them, either. They were far enough inside the mine's entrance that the air surrounding them was quite still. No odor of carrion would seep out far enough for even rats to smell. If neither people nor rats found them, they could be there forever. That knowledge provided soothing comfort for her.

She had a small wooden spade strapped to her back, the one she used when tilling fields of maize. She had done all the jobs women did: tilling and planting, harvesting and grinding, cooking and cleaning . . . and loving, too. Her life had been good—hard, but good. She had a brave husband who died defending their village against marauders from the south. She fought beside him, receiving an axe blow to the left side of her head. She nearly died from that and, after it healed, she was never quite her old self. Everyone said so.

She also lost her oldest son in the battle that took her husband and nearly killed her. Later, her two remaining sons died from fevers. She was alone and lonely when her beloved came into her life, giving her a reason to breathe again, to work hard and to thrive. Now, as before, she was alone and heartbroken, but no longer able to face that grim reality. Besides, what did it matter when she died? Death was inevitable and nothing to fear; she was old enough to be at peace with that. She never expected her life to end by her own hand, but she couldn't imagine anyone ever expecting to die that way.

Expected or not, the obligation was upon her, so she rose, refreshed by her rest, to orient herself for the digging. She chose to align the grave on the tunnel's long axis so that if anyone did manage to locate them, they'd be found lying together, side by side. In life her dearly beloved had possessed the largest part of her heart; in death that should, and would, be the same.

If anyone found them later, her devotion would be clear.

75 YEARS AGO

Her nickname was Pelo, short for Pelo Loco, the wild hair swirling across her forehead in a cowlick. She was fourteen or fifteen, strong-willed and rebellious, like most American teenagers. This day she found herself hijacked into a dingy Mexican backwater, her parents' home village.

Before Pelo's birth, her parents "emigrated" to the U.S. across the Rio Grande River into dry, dusty west Texas. After years of trying, they finally became legal American citizens, like their five children, so now they could cross the border whenever they wanted to, without fearing deportation. To celebrate their new citizenship, they brought their family for a two-week visit in the village they left as a young couple nearly twenty years earlier.

To Pelo the village seemed ancient, from another century. Set in a small, arid valley surrounded by weathered, shrub-covered foothills, it was far more primitive than her parents' stories conveyed. Yet she had to endure two weeks in it or face their wrath. She gritted her teeth and plastered on a smile as the ordeal began, a welcoming *acogida* where, among other things, Pelo and her siblings were introduced to several cousins, aunts, and uncles. They struck her as awkward, backward, or ugly—all except Roberto, two years older than she was. Him, she'd try to get to know better.

As the day waned, several village children offered to take the young *Americanos*—equally alien to them—on a guided tour of the village. Pelo and her siblings were all bilingual from birth, so language wasn't a problem. One thing that caught their attention was a copse of tall trees a mile from the village, along a ravine that twisted and turned far into the hills surrounding the valley. Bushes, shrubs, and cacti grew everywhere, all around, but other trees were few, isolated, and stunted. A cluster of large ones was a novelty.

"Those trees," Pelo said to Roberto, batting her eyes the way Clara Bow did in movies. "How did they get so big?"

"*Agua*," he explained. "In the ground, buried, where we cannot see it. The roots go down to drink. When our wells run dry, that is where we must dig for water. Without it our village would have died many times."

"*Interesante*," she muttered, making yet another mental note to never—*never!*—end up living in a place like this.

Later in the tour, Roberto and the others pointed out two caves visible in the sides of hills at some distance. Both had irregular vaulted openings and more-or-less flat bottoms, like half a grapefruit lying on a saucer.

"These you must not go into," Roberto said solemnly. "They are taboo because they are too dangerous."

"We have old mines, too!" a girl piped up. She seemed to be charmed by Pelo's twelve-year-old brother, Juan. "More dangerous than the caves."

"Yes, the roofs fall too easily," Roberto added. "You must not go in them, either, but they are not near. The rule is to stay out; that is best."

"Do you never break rules?" Pelo said, again batting Clara Bow eyes.

"Not this one," Roberto said firmly, as the heads of the other children shook accordingly. "People have disappeared in them. It is easy to get lost or have something fall on you."

"Besides," the young girl added, "if you climb up to one, the ground shows your tracks. Anyone could see them. You would be punished."

"How?" Pelo asked. "What would happen to you?"

The children looked confused, as if they had never considered that. Then Roberto's boyish expression hardened.

“I never want to find out.”

A week of slow, stifling days dragged past. Roberto stayed as proper as on the first day. Pelo couldn't coax him to touch her hand, much less hold it. He was afraid of her. Boys in El Paso were afraid of her, too. Now all she wanted was to get away, anywhere, to be alone for a while without the chatter of people trying to make her feel comfortable in a dried-out rat hole.

Finally, at the end of the week the oldest man in the village, the one called *Narizon* (Big Nose), said it would storm that evening. Storms seldom came to such an arid plain, but when they did, *Narizon's* aged bones warned him far enough in advance to give every villager a chance to prepare for it. In *Narizon's* warning, Pelo saw a chance to be alone.

900 YEARS AGO

The mine tunnel's floor was rubble and dirt, tracked in or created by the digging of countless men and no doubt some women, slaves of the “ancient ones,” sinister conquerors from the south who, the old ones said, demanded extraction of gold and silver from anywhere it could be found.

However the floor rubble got there, she was able to shovel into it to midway up her forearm before hitting the solid rock of the tunnel's original floor. It wouldn't provide a deep grave for her beloved, but when she fully covered the slight, frail body with what was there, it would be enough.

Following village custom, she unwound the cloth swaddling the corpse. Teary-eyed again, she gazed at the misshapen body, unlike her own but still, in its own special way, possessing true beauty. She eased it into the grave, mesmerized by the diminutive size, shorter than she was by a head or more, and now seeming even smaller. One last time she checked for outward signs of what might have caused the unexpected death. None was apparent.

Worms? Poisonous insect bite? Undetected disease? She had no way to know. Death came on its own schedule—now she had to deal with hers.

She turned the first shovelful into the grave, then another, and another. Soon the body was covered and the dirt neatly mounded up . . . except for one flourish she was careful to arrange. The malformed right hand and part of the slender forearm remained free of coverage. Taking time to be careful, she arranged it as she imagined it should be. She considered, adjusted, then readjusted again. Finally, she had it precisely where she wanted it.

Now it was her turn. She wasted no time, hurrying into it so that nothing—no feeling of dread or hesitation for any reason—could slow her momentum. Her worst fear was losing her nerve, losing the will to die with her dearly beloved. She felt in her heart that she wanted to do it, that she *could* do it, but she wouldn't be certain until she actually did it.

She removed her rough-spun clothes, tucking them in the same niche in the side wall where she tucked her beloved's swaddling cloth. Strapped to her waist was a deerskin scabbard holding one of her most prized possessions: a flint-blade knife that, many years ago, was a gift from her father to celebrate joining her new husband in his hut.

Its edge had dulled with use, but earlier that evening, after the death, while forming her plan to cope with it, she'd honed it sharp again. Now she unstrapped it, slinging the scabbard and belt far up into the tunnel, where she'd heaved the shovel when she finished with it. She had always been a neat, tidy person, which now was irrelevant. Yet she kept at it, doggedly, as if to stop now, in the last moments, would negate all that had gone before.

She lay down on the rubble beside her beloved, adjusting her position until she was where she needed to be to wrap the exposed right hand around the upper part of her left arm. In life they often went along like that, hand in hand or arm in arm, and she wanted to be certain they would carry forth into death the same way.

She smiled at that thought, pleased with herself . . . feeling ready to take the final step in her life's long journey.

Gripping the knife in a trembling right hand, she stabbed it into the right side of her neck, inside where the big artery was, pulsing with the life that would soon drain out of her. It didn't hurt, not the way she expected it to. She felt it slice through muscle and sinew, heard scraping sounds inside her right ear; then she tugged it sharply outward, slicing hard, which she followed with a vigorous sawing motion until the blade broke free and brought a *swoosh!* sound as a crimson spray spurted from the wound.

I did it! It's done! Fear hadn't stopped her . . . she was stronger than her fear. She felt satisfied.

Quickly, before she became faint, she heaved the knife up and back into the tunnel to join the shovel, scabbard, and strap—tidy to the end. She thought she heard it clatter where it struck, but she couldn't be sure. The sound of her neck wound pumping: *swoosh! . . . swoosh! . . . swoosh. . .*

Softer now . . . fading . . . her mind reeling deeper and deeper into the blackness surrounding her final repose. She felt the tunnel's coolness seep into her naked skin, fully exposed as she lay next to the fresh grave along her left side. *Swoosh . . . swoosh . . . even softer now . . . very faint. . .*

Soon, in no more than a few seconds, they would be reunited in the spirit world. She hoped they could find each other there quickly . . . she hoped the sacred connection they shared would remain intact. . . .

Always. . . .

Forever. . . .

75 YEARS AGO

Pelo announced that she wanted to pick berries. It was late summer, early August, before the new school year began in Texas. Desert berries such as hackberries, barberries, and madrone were ripe, and she had already been out picking with her cousins. Ordinarily, she wouldn't be able to go anywhere without an entourage of village kids swarming at her heels, but they were now as busy as their parents preparing for the heavy rain Narizon was certain would come in the night. In places built mostly of stone daubed with mud, places that saw minimal yearly rainfall, a pending severe storm was reason enough to batten down everything to minimize damage.

“Don’t go far or be gone long,” her mother warned, realizing it might be best to allow her headstrong daughter off the leash for a while. Everyone could see she was miserable under the restrictions of village life. “And put on your long pants. Snakes come out when storms come. Be careful!”

The only available basket was a large, unwieldy one, but Pelo didn’t mind. Lugging it was worth getting away from the stifling rigidity sucking her spirit as dry as the desert surrounding her. She walked fast, anxious to get away, until she reached the copse of trees she noticed the first day. No one in the village could see her there, so she took off at a jog, heading up into the hills surrounding the village. She didn’t worry about where the path might lead. Those fifty-foot-high trees provided an unmistakable landmark.

Keep them in sight, you can’t get lost.

Choking with pent-up energy, Pelo practically flew up the incline, rapidly putting distance between herself and the village, following the path past ravine after ravine, high up into the hills. She barely took notice of the thumping of her heart, or the flapping of the basket at her side. She focused on the exhilaration of being alone for the first time in seven days, alone and free to do anything. Such sudden, unlimited potential was thrilling.

Eventually fatigue and sweating caused her to stop. She gazed around, sides heaving, catching her breath. She was surprised at how far she’d come. She was well into the hills now, still able to see the small green ball of trees on the tan carpet below. She started walking while looking around, seeking something to catch her attention. It was all the same, all sand and rock and dusty brush, jumbled and unremarkable, not much different from El Paso.

She decided to wander up a small ravine. She could have chosen any of dozens, but this one seemed to call to her. In there she’d lose sight of the trees, but that wouldn’t be a problem. If she only went in, looked around, and went back out, the trees would still be visible when she returned.

Ten minutes in and it began narrowing to its end. She gazed ahead to see what she could see and noticed a roundish hole in the middle of its left flank. A thick, wide pile of detritus fanned out from that hole down to the bottom of the ravine. Dried branches were jumbled below its bottom edge, meaning bushes once flourished there but were now dead and desiccated. *A mine tunnel!*

Her mind seized on the forbidden fruit, knowing she could explore it now because her tracks would be washed out by the rain Narizon predicted.

It was cool, remarkably cool, considering the temperature outside. Even with a storm brewing, the air outside was torrid. Her sweat-soaked clothes clung to her, chilled her, but she didn’t care. She’d made it this far and now nothing would stop her. She’d see what the village taboo was all about, see if she could make it . . . *do what?* Cave in on her? Crush her to a bloody pulp? Goose bumps marched along her spine . . . she loved it.

Step . . . step . . . cautious step . . . cautious step. *Whoa! What’s that?* A vague, indistinct odor came to her, one she couldn’t place. *Sour milk?*

Another step and. . . *Wha—?* A gasp ripped out of her as she sucked her breath in recognition. *A skeleton!* Lying on its back up ahead on the mine tunnel floor was what looked like a complete human skeleton. *Ohmigod!*

Heart thumping, she inched forward to see better. Like many girls her age in west Texas, skeletons were not new to her. She’d seen horses, cows,

dogs, cats. If scavengers didn't find and consume a corpse, its bones would bleach white under the relentless sun. However, the only human skeleton she'd ever seen was hung from a standing-rod in her school's biology lab.

Pelo had signed up for biology this coming year, and the main reason was her fascination with that skeleton, the one kids at her school called "Mr. Bones." Now she found herself gazing at a real one, and she crept toward it with trepidation and utter fascination. *A real human skeleton!*

The first thing she noticed was its small size. She thought it could be a child. *Maybe like me!* A gush of adrenalin shot through her. *What killed it?* Heart thumping again, she gazed around furtively. *Something in here?*

She noticed the left upper arm bone. Something was on it. She looked closer in the faint light. *A hand!* No doubt about it, a hand was poked up out of the dirt and rubble beside the skeleton and was wrapped around its arm.

How did that happen? Was it buried alive? Did it try to get out? She leaned closer. *Whoa! Look at that!*

The hand was odd, contorted, missing fingers or something. *What happened to it?* She looked closer still and saw a bit of forearm emerging from the dusty rubble on the floor, which she saw was slightly mounded . . . *like a grave!* That was *it*, she realized . . . *the mound is a grave!*

Sweet . . . Mother . . . Mary!

Gathering courage, Pelo shoved a finger into the mound piled near the arm to see how it felt. *Not bad . . . not too stuck together.* She considered digging it up, wondering if she had a right to do that. *Well, why not? The other one is out in the open, isn't it? What's the difference?*

She dropped to her knees and began scraping rubble away from the arm. More bone appeared. Soon the entire arm was visible with parts of the shoulder. The grave was shallow, easy to clear. Tossing caution to the wind, Pelo began digging with furious energy, determined to get it all out in the open, to be as easy to see as the other skeleton.

In minutes it was exposed. She sat on her haunches, struggling to make sense of what was there. All of it was small . . . smaller than the one on the surface, and misshapen all over. *Big head . . . narrow little face . . . it has to be child. But wait! What if it's a monkey? . . . Or an ape?* No, she decided, it didn't look like a monkey or an ape. It looked more human than anything else. She felt certain it was.

But what kind of human has arms like that, and hands, and legs, and feet? And the head! What a strange shape! What kind of head is that?

A deformed one, silly! It's some kind of terrible deformity.

Gazing at both skeletons, she considered what to do next. She'd been gone over an hour, so it was time to start back. If she didn't return in a reasonable time, someone would go look for her, probably someone who could follow the tracks made by her *gringo* shoes with their distinctive heels. She couldn't risk that, not until after the rain came.

For reasons she didn't entirely understand, she felt compelled to take all the bones with her—both skeletons, full and complete. Maybe her school would want them. Maybe they could be hung on rods alongside Mr. Bones. She might even be given a reward for them! *Yes! That could happen!*

She hurried back to the mouth of the tunnel, where she had left the basket. She brought it in and knelt above the heads of both skeletons so the light from the opening could illuminate them. She lifted the first skull, the normal one, and it felt heavy, the way she imagined a skull ought to feel.

The deformed one was next, and it surprised her. Though its body was shorter by several inches, its head was the same size as the other; but in her hands it felt half as heavy, if that. Then she found that every other bone they shared was equally disparate in weight—skulls, arms, spines, hips, legs, feet.

Adding bones to the basket, she realized she never knew a body had so many. By the time she finished, she was afraid she might have missed one of the small ones—a neck bone, a foot bone, a finger bone. If she did, she knew she'd be too embarrassed to try to present them to her school.

She went back at it, sifting the rubble once more, convincing herself she had every last bone there. Nothing was left behind. She was sure she had them all.

She rose to her feet, brushed off as much dust and dirt as she could, then left, eager to return with her prizes. But she still had a major problem. She had broken the village taboo against going into caves or tunnels.

Walking from the tunnel mouth to the landmark copse of trees, she tried to figure a way to justify or explain going inside it. *What about coming right out and confessing?* That might win sympathy, if not admiration. But if she confessed, would she be allowed to keep the skeletons? They were hers now . . . *finders keepers!* Yet they had to come from the same village, which was hundreds of years old. It was so old, they told her, they didn't know *how* old—just ancient. The skeletons must be of villagers who died . . . *how?* The ceiling didn't fall in on them, that was obvious. But however they died, she had to assume she wouldn't be allowed to keep them, no matter what.

Maybe I can hide them and sneak them home!

That option didn't last long. *Where . . . ?* Everything she had with her was in a duffle bag, surplus from the World War. *Both skeletons together would take up half of that . . . and the sounds they'd make!* If it was anything like the clatter coming from the basket as she walked, she had no chance of getting them past her nosy siblings, much less her parents or the villagers.

Sensing defeat, she reached the copse of trees. It was now or never. She had to make a decision, but she couldn't.

I need more time!

Frantically, she looked for a place to hide the bones. She scrambled down the ravine, seeking a place large enough to hold them secure, yet obscured. She couldn't find anything that seemed suitable. In desperation, she looked up and inspiration struck. A section of the roots of one large tree had somehow been cleared of everything around them.

Pelo didn't bother wondering what might have created that clearing. She knew only a hollowed-out pocket was above her head and she could reach up and stuff all the bones inside it. They'd be safe and dry, protected from the coming rain until she could decide what to do with them.

Pelo explained her lack of berries and dirty clothes by saying she lounged under the copse of trees for a while and fell asleep. By then dark clouds hung

heavy in the west, toward the Pacific, so everyone was simply glad she was back, safe and sound, and nobody questioned her beyond that.

The rains were monumental, like nothing Pelo or any member of her family, much less the villagers, had ever experienced. For most of two days the heavens poured, turning all low, flat land into sticky mud, while carving countless new gullies. Rivulets tumbled down to intersect with ravines, and ravines eventually filled with torrents. Everyone was thankful for Narizon's warning, for it had allowed them to prepare well—even for this disaster.

On the third day the sun came out, bright as usual, and the village stirred back to life. The men went to inspect their fields and found no crops were salvageable. The winter stockpiles would have to be purchased. Pelo's father wrote a check for \$1000 U.S., enough to buy the corn and wheat and millet that would be needed, though he'd have to borrow it and pay it back in a year of driving his bus overtime. That was a small price for him to be able to relieve the anxiety of those who now looked up to him and his wife for having the courage—and good fortune—to succeed in *El Norte*.

The day after the rains stopped, while everyone in the village focused on repair and recovery, Pelo slipped away to try to retrieve both skeletons. She still didn't know how she could smuggle them past her siblings, past her parents, past U.S. Customs, and into her school, but she was committed to trying. It had become an obsession beyond reason for her . . . she *had* to try.

At the copse of trees she received the shock of her young life. Not one bone was where she left it—*nothing!* The area had been scoured clean by the torrents pouring into the ravine from the hills above. Even now, the stream tumbling through was several feet deep. Its peak height, she saw, was a few feet higher because the water had widened the banks, undercutting four more trees lining it. Her tree, the one sheltering her skeletons, was so undercut it fell across the ravine, its trunk stripped of bark by debris surging by.

“Ohhhhhh, noooooooo!” she wailed. *What can I do?*

Nothing. That was the simple answer. They were gone and that was that, so she turned to walk back toward the village, following the edge of the ravine in the hope that somehow, some way, at least one of the bones might have tumbled where she could see it. If she had nothing more than that, only one small memento of her secret discovery, she felt she could be satisfied.

One small piece . . . please, God . . . just one.

A half mile from the copse, midway between it and the village, the ravine took a turn to the right. Growing on the near bank in the curve of the turn were four greasewood bushes with limp, broken limbs a foot up from their bases, though higher limbs had withstood the torrent. *Ohmidios!*

Something was tangled in a couple of the mid-level limbs! *A skull?* Pelo moved closer, hardly daring to trust her eyes. *Yes! A skull!* Not a toe bone, not a finger, a whole skull! She felt like yelping with joy but couldn't risk any villagers hearing her. *Thank you, God! I'll take good care of it!*

She kept silent as she crept to the greasewood bushes, unfolding the gunny sack she brought to carry the anticipated booty. The second of the four held her prize, which up close she could see was the “normal” skull, the one lying on the mine floor's surface. Its soaking tumble through the ravine hadn't

hurt it badly. Its lower jaw was missing, but that didn't surprise her because when she loaded them into the basket she noticed the lower jaws weren't connected to the skulls. Also, the right cheekbone was broken off and missing, but the left cheek and the upper jaw were intact.

Gazing at it, her first impression held. She was amazed by how good its teeth were . . . stained quite a bit, but free of cavities and well-aligned, though the ones in the back were worn flat, like a horse's teeth. Pelo already had five fillings and, with a taste for sweets, she was sure she'd have many more. *What a lucky person to have such fine teeth!*

She tucked it into the gunny sack, then turned to start looking through the jumble of limbs comprising the rest of the bushes. Three minutes later, in the backside limbs of the last bush, she found the other skull. *Hallelujah!* It hadn't fared as well. The entire upper jaw was torn off, along with most of the bridge of the nose, and both cheekbones were broken at the nubs where they connected to the cranium. Now it looked even stranger than before.

Suddenly, nearer to the ground, she noticed something thumb-sized wedged between two finger-sized limbs. It was the right half of the upper jaw, somehow separated from the other half. Two rear teeth were still there, but the three in front, the smallest ones, were missing, lost in the half-mile tumble until the greasewood sieved them from the torrent.

The whole lower face was so much smaller than the normal skull's, it seemed a wonder that half of it remained in her hand. She turned it over to look in the front tooth holes. There, she saw beveled edges of new teeth tucked in at the bottoms. No doubt about it, new teeth coming in.

It was a child! I knew it!

Pelo put the skulls and the piece of jaw into the gunny sack, wrapping each so they didn't touch. Their bumping together made a distinct sound she couldn't afford to have anyone notice when she returned and went about transferring them from the sack to her duffel bag. Two whole skeletons she never could have managed, but two skulls. . . .

I'll find a way to manage that!

PROVENANCE

The idea that things must have a beginning is really due to the poverty of our imaginations.

Bertrand Russell

Even if beginnings are made necessary by a lack of imagination, they remain important to us all, but especially when an object under consideration could prove to be the most important relic in world history. Such is the case with the genuine bone skull known as the *Starchild*. In these pages you will come to understand its staggering potential, and learn why it might answer the most loaded question humans can ever pose: *Are we alone in the universe?*

A considerable amount of scientific testing has already been done on this remarkable skull, providing enough reliable data to strongly suggest it doesn't resemble the skull of any of the estimated 10,000,000,000 (ten billion) humans who have ever lived on Earth. It seems truly one of a kind.

We still don't know as much as we can know, and one day will know, about the Starchild, but in eight years we've learned a great deal about it, and what we know is, for the most part, astonishing. However, we'll begin by focusing on what we don't know—its background story, or *provenance*.

In scientific terms, provenance comprises all that is known about the discovery and subsequent progress of an artifact or relic, from its original position (*in situ*) through the hands of every person who deals with it. The typical museum artifact or relic will have a complete provenance record, but certain ones do not. Those include countless pieces with archeological value obtained through private collectors, and even from the black market.

While a provenance with a meticulous chain of custody is preferable, it is not the sole criterion, or even necessary, to authenticate an artifact or relic. The obvious reality of its existence is usually adequate. So it is with the Starchild, whose existence is undeniable. However, its provenance is incomplete enough to get its story off on a very wrong foot.

Chapter One was an imagined “re-creation” based on what I know, or believe I know, about how those two skeletons came to be where they were found. All of it was based on the best information I have, the few verifiable facts

I'm aware of, and the most reasonable assumptions I could make based on what I understand, though any or all of it could have been quite different.

The native woman (we know it was a woman) could have killed the Starchild (we don't know its sex) before burying it. Or it could have been killed by someone else, though we assume (or prefer to believe) it died of a natural cause. She could have buried it first, then come back at some time—even years later—to lie down beside it and die, not prematurely by her own hand, but by the end phase of some terminal disease. Possibilities abound.

There is also this: at some point in the woman's life she suffered a serious concussion. The thick bone of her skull's left parietal area (twice as thick as the Starchild's) has a spidery circle of fracture lines around a small central point of sharp impact, much like a rock ding on a car's windshield. Though healed, the injury could have made her crazy—maybe crazy enough to kill the Starchild and take her own life. Here, too, possibilities abound.

My goal was to create a fiction that would fit the facts as closely as possible.

The facts as I understand them are simple but incomplete. A woman from El Paso, Texas, found the skulls when she was in her early teens, sometime around 1930, while visiting her parents' home village in Mexico, 100 miles southwest of Chihuahua. This is all we know about the village's location, so returning to it at present is impossible.

Near the village were several caves and old mine tunnels. She was told not to go in them because they were rickety and dangerous, but like most teenagers warned to avoid something mysterious and potentially dangerous, she ignored the risks and slipped away to do some exploring.

In a mine tunnel—not a cave—she found two skeletons: one supine on the surface, one buried in a shallow grave beside it with a hand stuck up to wrap around the upper arm bone of the one on the surface. In the discoverer's later life, she described the hand as “misshapen,” adding that the rest of the skeleton was equally misshapen. She also said that its frame was noticeably smaller than surface one.

If the oddness of the skull is a reasonable gauge of the body's overall shape, it's easy to see why the discoverer described the entire skeleton as misshapen. Also, given that the size of the native woman's skull is smaller than average, she is presumed to be in the range of five feet tall, a common adult height in Mexico today. Thus, it seems safe to assume the Starchild, described as “smaller,” was around four feet tall, give or take a few inches.

The discoverer did try to recover both skeletons, hauling them away in a basket and hiding them near large trees in proximity to the village, hoping to gain time to figure out how to handle so many bones. A torrential storm did come and washed them all away. She did go looking and found only the two skulls and jaw piece from the “deformed” one.

From the village she did smuggle her prizes back into the U.S., then kept them for the rest of her life. Early on she shellacked the outside of both skulls, which acted as an excellent preservative for them. Later, she put them in a cardboard box, where they stayed until a terminal disease took her life in the early 1990s, not long after she passed her unusual legacy on to others.

Significant evidence appears to corroborate this story. For example, staining on the rear of the adult skull closely matches staining on the entire Starchild skull. This strongly supports that the adult skull was resting supine on the soil of the mine tunnel's floor, while the Starchild was indeed buried under it. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that if such an important detail in the story can be validated, the rest has a good chance to be proved accurate.

Now consider the discoverer's claim that she exhumed the skeleton with her bare hands. For a typical grave, soil compaction from rain would make that impossible. She'd need no less than a trowel, probably a shovel. But for a grave in a rainproof tunnel, compaction would not occur. The soil covering the body would be dampened only once, internally, by dissolution of flesh, blood, and fat by the worms and bacteria all creatures carry in their bodies. This is what decomposes them when they die.

In non-arid conditions bone, too, would be consumed by bacteria, mold, and fungus. Nature cleans its plate—but not in an arid mine tunnel. With no wind, rain, or airborne spores to provide a means of consumption, bones remain intact. They will desiccate, but they won't dissolve away. So it was in this case, where a pair of well-preserved skeletons were allegedly found—one exposed only to torpid ambient air, the other buried in non-compacted soil.

To corroborate the story, the discoverer would have to be interviewed, but her untimely death rules that out. However, she had a husband, children, friends, and an extended family in Mexico, so surely some of them know many more details of her tale than the few we have thus far. Unfortunately, here is where things get sticky.

She married a man who worked for a U.S. Government agency. With a job like that, he was never comfortable with a pair of "smuggled" skulls in their mutual possession, though nothing was legally wrong with having them because they were recovered and transferred so long ago. Then, in the early 1990s, she learned she was terminally ill. Knowing her husband was not comfortable with the skulls, she decided to secure a new home for them, as one might arrange for pets to be relocated in similar circumstances.

She asked a good friend if he and his wife would accept them. The friend agreed, as any good friend would. However, he also worked for a U.S. Government agency (a different one), and he was as leery as the first fellow about keeping a pair of human skulls. Again, there was nothing intrinsically wrong in having them, but apparently both men felt that, considering their careers, keeping them provided no benefit and created an unnecessary risk.

The second couple kept the skulls five years, until 1998, when they decided to find somebody with fewer misgivings about owning them. They asked two younger friends, ironically named Ray and Melanie Young. One of them, Melanie, had an extensive medical background that left her with no qualms about keeping human skulls, weird or normal. However, when the Youngs saw the weird skull's *degree* of weirdness, they were impressed by how closely it followed the outline of the heads of so-called "Grey" aliens.

Greys are the most commonly portrayed alien form, with small, slight bodies, slender limbs, thin necks, teardrop-shaped heads, small lower faces, and haunting, black, ovoid eyes. We've all seen depictions of them; they're ubiquitous in major movies, TV shows and documentaries, magazines, and

books—most notably the startling cover of *Communion*, in which Whitley Strieber famously revealed his ongoing interactions with a group of them.

Ray and Melanie were members of El Paso's Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) chapter, so they knew how a Grey's skull might look. They told the couple handing over the skulls that they thought the weird one was odd enough to warrant expert analysis to determine what it was. Melanie's medical background suggested to her that despite its strange look, it was probably what the discoverer assumed—a natural deformity of some kind. However, because it was so light and its outline was so far beyond normal, and because she knew what Greys looked like, she wanted to be as certain as possible about its pedigree. The other couple agreed, but with a caveat.

Because the first owner's husband and the second couple's husband worked for the U.S. Government, they were concerned about doing anything to endanger their pensions. Anyone who works for Uncle Sam knows well enough that discussing the possibility of alien life forms is an E-ticket to immediate trouble and possible sanctions, up to and including pension reduction or punitive revocation. Thus, keeping one's head down is the best course of action, given the well-known retaliation against those who don't toe the "party line" in all matters of official or unofficial policy.

Knowing that, Ray and Melanie agreed to the restrictions and the deal was done. For better or worse, they were now the sole, undisputed owners of two skulls of dubious antiquity. They knew nothing about them except the sparse story about the discovery in a mine tunnel, and six or so decades in a cardboard box tucked away in a series of garages. But to them, that didn't matter. What mattered was finding out, beyond any shadow of doubt, what the unusual skull was—or was not—or what it *might* conceivably be.

That soon exposed the problems with its provenance.

Any gap in the provenance of an artifact or relic (artifacts are man-made, relics are natural) leaves open the chance of a fraud or hoaxing in a wide range of duplicitous ways. The same skills and technology brought to world-class art forgery can be brought to "weathering" and "aging" artifacts to make them look ancient when they are, in fact, recent. So, while a gap in a provenance doesn't *prove* mischief, it creates a possibility, which is often enough to eliminate an item from consideration for that reason alone.

Fortunately, there is no chance of the Starchild being a hoax or fraud. The most cursory examination shows it is made entirely of bone and nothing else. Anyone can see it is not cobbled together using disparate bones, as was the Piltdown Man hoax that fooled the scientific community for forty years. In the Starchild skull, each bone element fuses seamlessly with those that conjoin with it. Its individual bones have highly unusual shapes not seen in typical humans, which is what makes it what it is—a *kind* of human.

The overriding question now is: *What* kind of human?

It would be wonderful for all concerned if the Starchild skull had a perfect provenance; it would be vastly more convenient all the way around. Nonetheless, it is clearly, stunningly *real*—a bone skull of vaguely human outline that requires a full explanation from scientists who usually spare no effort to avoid dealing with things that threaten their status quos. They will gladly hide behind a shaky provenance if given any sliver of opportunity.

Luckily, it won't always be this way. As stated earlier, the woman who found the skulls had friends and family who know more details about its provenance. Among her friends were the couple who gave it to Ray and Melanie Young, so through them her identity should, barring calamity, be within reach. It is simply a matter of giving, to those people who knew her well, enough motivation to identify themselves and tell what they know. That's one of several purposes we hope this book will serve.

We also hope to accomplish three other goals: (1) to put the Starchild case before citizens around the world so they can view, study, and judge its merits for themselves; (2) motivate mainstream scientists and the institutions they serve to overcome their natural reluctance to be involved in any issue suggesting a wider reality than the one they are currently comfortable with. We hope some bolder ones among them will dare to express an interest in evenhandedly conducting any conceivable test that can wring a shred of usable information from the Starchild's bone. Only then can we all know beyond any measure of reasonable doubt precisely what it is—or is not.

These are expensive matters, so the third important goal is: (3) to interest wealthy individuals who may be inclined to bankroll the blizzard of tests that should be performed on any relic of undoubted historical importance. Consider the many millions spent thoroughly testing Otzi, the Neolithic hunter found in September, 1991, frozen under a retreating glacier along the Austrian-Italian border. No effort has been spared determining the minutest details about Otzi, collecting every scrap of data anybody could imagine needing, which is certainly warranted in a case as unique as his.

For as valuable as Otzi is, he tells us only about our fairly recent history (5,000 years ago). The Starchild skull can do vastly more, it can provide a yardstick for measuring humanity's place in the cosmos. With so much at stake, it deserves no less sparing of effort to determine absolutely everything that can be learned about it. When testing is complete, everyone involved may be able to proudly declare they were a part—however large or small—of making history on a scale few are ever lucky enough to achieve.

With that in mind, let our story begin at its second beginning. . . .

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

The most exciting phrase in science, the one that heralds new discoveries, is not 'Eureka!' but 'That's funny . . .'

Isaac Asimov

Ray Young is an electrical engineer for El Paso's Power & Light Company. He's tall, solidly built, and matter-of-fact. His wife Melanie is a massage therapist with her own spa. She's as solid as Ray on a smaller scale, with a similarly straightforward manner. They have two dogs, no children living at home, and a hot tub they love to utilize at their house in El Paso's seared suburbs. They would be extraordinarily ordinary if not for being the "parents" of the two "kids" (as Melanie calls them) at the heart of this book.

She calls them kids because prior to establishing her spa she was a registered nurse working in a specialty unit for neonatal intensive care. She studied and worked with every manner of human deformity in infancy and beyond, which—more than any other reason—was why she and Ray were asked to take the orphan skulls. The couple who had them for five years felt Melanie could be comfortable with the one they assumed was deformed.

The two skulls in the cardboard box were given to them in October of 1998. Melanie's wide range of professional training provided her with enough knowledge of human physiology to know that the weird skull didn't fall within the boundaries of typical deformity. Also, her association with MUFON (the Mutual UFO Network) gave her enough knowledge about UFOs, and UFOlogy in general, to make a valid connection between the shape and outline of that skull and the alien beings known as Greys. She was convinced that several types of aliens were real, and Greys were one of those types. From her doubly educated perspective, the weird skull might somehow, someday, be one of theirs.

Like any rational person, Melanie knew her view was extreme, but it was well-balanced by her medical training that told her in all likelihood the skull was indeed some kind of bizarre natural deformity. Nonetheless, until she could be absolutely certain of it, she'd leave her mental door ajar. For his part, Ray shared Melanie's feelings on both ends of the scale, so he suggested they should consult with Dan Alegro about their new quandary.

Dan Alegro was a regular attendee at El Paso's MUFON meetings, which they also often attended. A manager for a large meat-packing firm, he—like most MUFON members—had seen a UFO with his own eyes and was certain they were real. When it came to UFOlogy, Dan Alegro was widely read, studious, and well-informed. In MUFON his opinions were highly regarded, so he was an ideal choice to consult about the weird skull.

Ray and Melanie called to ask to meet with him at a convenient time and place. He suggested they meet after the November MUFON meeting, which they all planned to attend. Dan didn't ask what the rendezvous would be about and Ray and Melanie didn't offer any explanation. That was how it often was in UFO circles. Phones were not necessarily disinterested parties.

During the monthly meeting Dan was his usual self, chatting and charming his way around the group. Afterward, he and Ray and Melanie moved out to the parking lot to end up standing behind their car. It looked like a routine after-meeting discussion until all of the other attendees were gone. Then Ray opened the trunk, lifted out the cardboard box, and opened it, revealing the skulls inside. Each was nestled in a bed of foam padding crafted by the original owner to keep them from bumping together.

With Ray towering over him in the dim light, Dan looked up from the box, his brow crinkled beneath a snow-white crew cut. "Is this a joke?"

"Dead serious," Ray replied. "No pun intended."

"Are they what I think they are?"

"One is," Melanie said. "It's from a small-stature adult human, five feet or so. But the other one—it's pretty weird, even for me. I know I've never seen anything like it."

Ray lifted the adult skull for Dan to heft. He gave it a quick once-over. "The back of its head is flat."

"Cradleboarding," Melanie said. "I looked it up. Caused when a woman straps a baby to a board—especially its head, for safety—so she can carry it around on her back."

Dan nodded. "Common with natives years ago." He then turned to take the weird one from Ray in his other hand. He gripped it and his eyes snapped wide. "Good Lord!" he muttered. "This feels like it weighs half as much!"

"Almost exactly half," Melanie said. "We weighed them."

"A little over a pound for the weird one," Ray said, taking back the adult. "This is almost two and a quarter."

Dan studied the back of the weird skull, then made a sweeping gesture around it with his free hand. "All this flattening back here . . . is that cradleboarding, too?"

"Not sure," Melanie replied. "I can't find any references for such an extensive area, so it's probably something else. But the weight is the main problem for me. I *am* sure there is *no* way it should be that light. Not from what I know about human bodies—even if it belonged to a child."

"You think it was a child?"

Melanie lifted the small piece of detached jaw. "This is its upper right maxilla." She held it against her upper right lip. "It fits like this." She handed it to him. "See how small and flat it is? The size of a newborn, yet it had teeth. Now look inside the three empty sockets. See anything in there?"

Dan's head shook. "Too dark out here."

"New teeth at the top of the holes," Ray said. "It's a kid."

Dan handed the maxilla back, then resumed with the skull, twisting and turning it in the lights of the parking lot, more than bright enough to see the outline of its shape and contours. "It sure does look like a Grey. If the missing face was as small as the jaw piece, it's a good fit . . . very close."

"Not the eyes," Melanie put in. "They're weird, but not those spooky eyes of Greys."

"The black teardrops?" Dan shrugged. "Don't base anything on them. Many researchers think they're goggles worn for protection . . . from light . . . from motes in the air . . . whatever. Underneath, their eyes could be more or less like ours. But from the look of such shallow sockets, I'd guess any eyeballs in them would bulge out a lot more than ours."

"The alien autopsy showed eyes like ours," Ray agreed, "but bulging out quite a bit."

In 1995, a film surfaced purporting to show the autopsy of an alien body recovered from the widely known, hotly debated UFO crash outside Roswell, New Mexico, in July of 1947. Its eyes bulged out from sockets that could have been as astonishingly shallow as those staring blindly into that chilly mid-November evening in El Paso. Among UFO buffs, debate still raged about the autopsy film's validity or lack thereof, but no one could doubt the reality of what Ray, Melanie, and Dan Alegro held in their hands.

Melanie put them back on track. "The rest of this head is different from the alien in the film. That head seemed a lot bigger and rounder."

"Don't judge anything by that film. It could easily be bogus. But most of the eyewitness testimony says this is how a Grey skull should look. It has the right size, the right shape, the right weight. Remember, Corso said the Roswell bodies were short, and the bones were light and strong."

A year earlier, in 1997, the UFOlogy world was rocked by publication of the memoirs of Philip J. Corso, a retired army colonel who claimed to be an insider to the aftermath of the UFO crash at Roswell. His testimony about aliens and their technology had been subjected to as much criticism as the autopsy film, but as Dan Alegro held the Starchild skull in his hands, Col. Corso's words about the alleged Roswell aliens seemed eerily prescient.

Corso had said they were *about four feet tall*, which jibed with the discoverer's claim that the weird skull's skeleton was the size of a child. Corso also said their bones were *thinner but seemed stronger, as if their atoms are aligned differently for greater tensile strength*. Dan couldn't judge the weird skull's tensile strength, but he had no doubt it was thinner and lighter than the other skull.

"That's why we're talking to you," Melanie said. "You know a heck of a lot more about all this than we do."

Dan turned it over once more, carefully, then handed it back. "This could be extremely important. It needs to be analyzed, inside and out, by specialists with credentials so their opinions are respected by scientists."

"We figured that already," Ray replied. "What we need to know is who we can trust. We were hoping you could help us with that part."

Dan shrugged. "I work in meat packing." He focused on Melanie. "What about you? You maintain ties with the medical community. Don't you know anyone who could give you some straight answers about it?"

Melanie considered for a moment. "I have a friend . . . a psychiatrist who's also an osteopath. We refer patients to each other. She specializes in

cranial manipulation for migraines, TMJ, things like that. She may not be a world-class skull expert, but she may know enough to get us going.”

“Okay,” Dan said, “start with her. See what she says.”

Dr. Roberta Fennig didn’t mince words. “It’s quite unusual, Melanie, possibly unique. I’m sure I’ve never seen anything like this in my practice. You want my advice? Take it to specialists and have it fully evaluated.”

“But *you’re* a specialist!” Melanie blurted.

“Not for something like this. I don’t see enough deformity. I’m sure you saw more when you were in neonatal care. How does it strike you?”

“Back in 1930, when it was found, if a newborn’s head had one deformity, serious trouble. Two things wrong, very high risk. Three things wrong, almost certain death. This skull has *everything* wrong! All of its parts are abnormal, yet it lived at least a few years, long enough to grow teeth.”

“In my limited experience,” Dr. Fennig said, “deformity is ugly. This skull, in a way, is beautiful. The symmetry is amazing. And it’s so light!”

“Much too light, much too symmetrical . . . weird.”

“I agree. I think you may well have something unique here. If you want to pursue that angle, I can recommend experts for you to consult.”

“Great!” Melanie replied, so Dr. Fennig wrote two names.

“One is an orthopedic surgeon,” she said, “the other, a pathologist. I could add an EENT (eye, ear, nose and throat) specialist, but I don’t know him well. These two I consider friends. They’ll give you a fair hearing.”

Because Roberta Fennig was their friend, the orthopedic surgeon and the pathologist agreed to meet with Ray and Melanie one afternoon at the pathologist’s office. The married couple sat, watching and listening, as two bona fide experts tried to determine what they were looking at. One would suggest a possible deformity, then the other would offer a better alternative. Soon they drifted into genetic deformities. Lingo and jargon flew like darts around the room, leaving Ray and Melanie duly impressed—and confused.

“Can you give us a bottom line?” Ray finally asked.

“Most likely a cradleboarded hydrocephalic,” the orthopedic surgeon pronounced, in an opinion that would often be voiced by others. “Notice the adult skull, the flattening at the rear of the head? That’s cradleboarding.”

“Even today, in certain primitive cultures,” the pathologist added, “all babies are strapped to their mother’s back as she goes about her daily work. If the work includes regularly stooping over, the baby’s head can’t be left to shift freely or its neck will be injured. So it’s bound to a board to hold it still, and in a few months its soft skull fully conforms to the board’s flat surface.”

“Also,” the surgeon added, “hydrocephaly, water on the brain, is a rather common birth defect. Add that to the extensive cradleboarding in the atypical skull, and this is really nothing to get excited about.”

“Are you sure?” Ray pressed. “I mean, *absolutely* sure?”

The men looked at each other, and then the pathologist spoke. “Not with only this much to go on. There is always room for different interpretations.”

“However,” the orthopedic surgeon added, “you can be confident no reputable specialist will tell you anything other than what we’re telling you. It simply *has* to be some kind of natural deformity. Whether it was caused by a known genetic defect or a unique flaw at conception is irrelevant.”

“Are there *no* other possibilities?” Melanie asked, trying to coax either man to speculate about the unmentioned issue of alien life forms.

“None we can consider,” the surgeon answered. “You see, science has a starting point from which we all work, based on Occam’s razor. That’s the idea that the simplest solution to a problem is usually the correct one.”

“Right,” the pathologist chimed in. “So Occam’s razor applied to this skull tells us that while it is undoubtedly strange and unusual, it falls within the possible range of natural deformity because that range is, for all practical purposes, infinite. In other words, with deformity *anything* is possible, and given an infinite range of possibility, this skull surely fits somewhere.”

Based on Dr. Fennig’s guardedly positive reaction, the Youngs had worked themselves into a mild frenzy of anticipation that these gentlemen would confirm that their skull was simply *too* unusual to be a typical deformity. Consequently, they left the meeting deflated enough to be ready to tuck the skull box in their garage and be done with it.

What was the point of taking their “kids” to anyone else? Two highly qualified experts had spoken. If they couldn’t trust friends of a friend, who *could* they trust?

At the December MUFON meeting they once again discussed their situation with Dan Alegro, recounting for him the “official” opinions they had received. Dan didn’t react with the resignation they anticipated.

“They have no way to know if it was a Grey, a Green, or a Blue. Heck, maybe Grey skulls *do* look like cradleboarded hydrocephalics. Maybe those guys saw what they wanted to see, what they expected to see. I doubt it’s as cut-and-dry as they said. I think their minds were closed going in.”

“Maybe so,” Ray agreed, “but they seemed convinced.”

“Ha! Don’t get me started on ignorant people who think they know what’s what because they’re in Who’s Who.”

“Okay,” Melanie put in, “what should we do now?”

“Take them outside the doctor club, to someone with no built-in prejudices, no reputational axe to grind. Especially find someone with no commitment to that damned Occam’s razor! I’m sick of hearing about it!”

Little wonder. Occam’s razor is the weapon skeptics use most often against UFOs. It suggests that given the lack of hard, can’t-be-denied proof of extraterrestrial spacecraft, plus the seeming impossibility of getting from distant stars to Earth in reasonable timeframes, the simplest answer is that UFOs not only don’t exist, but *can’t* exist. This is based on science’s firm belief that no spacecraft could travel beyond the speed of light with absolute security. They reject the possibility that other sentient beings may be able to surpass it because that would upend their gilded seats at the center of their—and our—intellectual universe. Such privilege is not easily relinquished.

“If you have someone in mind,” Ray said, “we’ll be happy to talk to them.”

Dan considered a moment. The small but active field of alternative knowledge researchers contained an inviting group of potential candidates.

One might be Whitley Strieber, author of *Communion*, a multimillion selling book with the haunting image of a Grey on the cover. That single painting had solidified the Grey “mug shot” in the public’s mind. Whitley’s money and influence made him a good choice if he could be persuaded to come

to El Paso to investigate the matter, then agree to trouble himself with taking the time to find out for certain what the weird skull really was.

Another might be Linda Moulton Howe, award-winning documentary film producer, ex-beauty queen, and diligent researcher into cattle mutilations, crop circles, testimony by government and military witnesses to the reality of UFO crashes, alien bodies hidden behind maximum secrecy, and many other areas of alternative interest. She, too, could make things happen if she would take time from her busy schedule to visit El Paso and get involved.

Derrel Sims. Roger Leir. Stanton Friedman. All were possibilities, but their primary interests were not relic-oriented. The only person Dan Alegro could think of who focused heavily on skulls was . . . “Lloyd Pye.”

“*Who?*” Melanie asked. She and Ray knew, or knew of, several personalities in the field of alternative knowledge. Lloyd Pye wasn’t one.

“A new guy, only started speaking at conferences late last year. He used to be a fiction writer—novels, screenplays, television shows.”

“A *fiction* writer?” Ray said edgily. “That’s not good.”

“It will always work against him,” Dan agreed. “On the other hand, he knows skulls like Colonel Sanders knows chicken. He’d be perfect for this.”

“How well do you know him?” Melanie asked.

“Well enough. I met him earlier this year at the Ozark conference in Arkansas. He was one of the speakers. We had lunch together. I like him.”

“What does he speak about?”

“Human origins and what he calls ‘hominoids.’ That’s bigfoot, the abominable snowman, and other creatures like them around the world. He also talks about Zecharia Sitchin’s work—all that Sumerian tablet stuff.”

Ray sighed heavily. “He writes fiction *and* he believes in bigfoot? This is really not good, Dan.”

“Listen, I know how bigfoot *sounds*, just to say it. But if you saw Lloyd’s presentation, if you saw the scientific material he uses to back up the things he says, you’d be as impressed as I am. Everywhere he speaks, he blows audiences away. He’s good with words, thinks fast on his feet, and each time he’s on the radio with Art Bell, he gets people really cranked up. He’s what you’re looking for.”

Art Bell was the biggest name in alternative knowledge, the keeper of the keys to widespread access. His show went for five hours each weeknight, with replays on the weekend. In 1998 his nightly audience was 5 to 10 million listeners. If Lloyd Pye was a regular guest on Art Bell’s radio show, that was like having the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval.

“What about UFOs and aliens?” Melanie asked, in her no-nonsense way of focusing on the primary consideration. “Does he talk about those, too?”

“Not straight out. He uses Sitchin’s Sumerian material to support alien intervention way back in history, when humans appeared out of nowhere on Earth. But he doesn’t talk about UFOs or current alien visitation. He avoids anything paranormal or metaphysical, or too far removed from hard science. He leaves all the woo-woo stuff to others.”

“Doesn’t sound like he’s right for this,” Melanie pressed.

“Look, he knows skulls because they’re a major aspect of his bigfoot research, and he’s a great speaker. If your skull is what you think it might be, you’ll need someone who can talk to media as well as he can.”

Ray and Melanie glanced at each other again, using the silent but effective communication all couples develop over time. A lifted eyebrow, a small tug on a strand of hair. The decision was being made . . . it *was* made.

“Where’s he from?” Melanie asked.

“New Orleans.”

Ray grimaced. “That’s a long haul from here.”

“He travels a lot. Maybe he’s planning to come this way before long. If so, we can invite him to speak to our MUFON group. But Lloyd or not, you have to start with someone.”

“You’re right,” Melanie said. “How do we contact him?”

“Leave it to me.”

In mid-December the phone rang in my one-bedroom apartment in Metairie, a suburb of New Orleans. I was alone, as usual, handling emails. “Hello?”

“Lloyd, Dan Alegro here. How’s it going in Cajunland?”

“Fine, Dan! The city always gets decked out for Christmas. It won’t be white, of course. Cold is about as seasonal as things get around here.”

“We get white ones now and then. Rare, though. . . .”

I let his pause hang so he could get to the point if he wanted to.

“Ahhhh . . . listen, Lloyd, can you tell me if you think you might be coming to west Texas any time soon? Any trip this way on your calendar?”

“Late February I speak at the UFO Congress in Laughlin, Nevada—the big one. El Paso’s not on the way, but I can swing by if it’s important.”

“I think it could be. Some people I know here have something they want to show you. I’d appreciate it if you’d trouble yourself to take a look.”

“What is it?”

“That’s best left for telling when you get here. But if you’ll trust my judgment that it could be important, I’ll make it worth your while to come.”

“I trust you, Dan,” and I did. When we met in Arkansas, I was quite impressed by his sincerity and people skills. “What do you have in mind?”

“You could speak to our MUFON group anytime in February. We’re small and can’t pay much of a speaker fee, but you can sell your book to us.”

By then I knew the main roads west like I knew the main streets of New Orleans, so I didn’t need to check my calendar. “I have to be in Laughlin late on the nineteenth, so what say we aim for the eighteenth?”

“That’ll work. When it’s locked in, I’ll email the details.”

Until a year prior to that call in late 1998, I was a not-very-successful fiction writer. I had published two novels, written for a few television shows, had half-a-dozen screenplays optioned, and generally struggled to secure a well-paying niche in commercial fiction. In frustration, I finally turned my writing skills, such as they were, to the area of my life where I had strong personal interest but poor commercial potential—alternative knowledge.

During my years of struggle to become a good fiction writer, I had a hobby of sorts—reading anything I could find about *hominoids*, a word that technically describes the Hominoidea, a superfamily of primates (humans, chimps, gorillas, orangutans, gibbons), as well as their presumed extinct ancestral forms known collectively as *Miocene apes*. I use “hominoid” to refer to

upright walking, hair-covered creatures that are not extinct but are dismissed by mainstream science and media as UFO/alien type fantasies.

Relatively few people knew of my interest in hominoids. It wasn't the kind of thing to endear me to acquaintances, much less family or friends. It was, instead, a subject that turned people off in droves because every media sees to it that in "sensitive" areas that might offend scientists or religionists, ignorance of fundamental facts is promoted as an across-the-board policy.

By late 1997, I had written a book called *Everything You Know Is Wrong: Book One—Human Origins*. Despite many years of disappointments with my fiction work, I expected this book to be well-received by editors in mainstream publishing houses in New York. It was standard nonfiction, always an easier sell than fiction; it broke much new ground in several areas of alternative research; and I was willing to promote it night and day.

With all that going for it, I expected little trouble getting it published, but I couldn't entice a single literary agent (by then I knew a few) to read it, much less represent it to publishers. Nobody wanted to see a "fringe" book with such an in-your-face title. Two mid-level agents said they'd look at it if I'd change the title, which I wouldn't agree to do because the book's core theme was that virtually everything we think we "know" that has current scientific significance will, in time, be seen in the same light as every other bit of "certain" knowledge in history—as flamingly, stupidly wrong.

I decided to publish it myself, after which came the endless grind of promoting it, out "on the road," facing challenges I never considered before embarking. For all of 1998, I traveled around the U.S. giving slide-backed presentations about my new book (*EYKIW* for short), selling copies at the bookstores and alternative knowledge gatherings where I spoke. I drove 70,000 miles to sell 15,000 books from the trunk of my car, while gaining a reputation as one of the better platform speakers in the field.

Now 1999 loomed as another year of long-haul driving to share my message and sell even more copies of *EYKIW*. It was hard going, the hardest of my life since I quit playing football thirty years earlier, but I was getting it done and seeing good things happen. I just had to keep them coming.

I would arrange presentations along circuitous routes that focused on at least one major venue and a few smaller ones. On the trip beginning in El Paso, I had six lined up: two in Colorado and one each in Texas, Nevada, Arizona, and Arkansas. This trip's biggie was the second, in Nevada.

The circuit would require a full month to complete. That was as long as I dared to be gone because receiving email away from home was yet to be made readily available. I'd return to find 1,000 to 2,000 emails waiting, which required eight hours a day for three or four days to plow through.

My clothes were hung on a metal bar between two hooks above the rear windows of my 1992 Buick Roadmaster. I'd cram its trunk with boxes of books—20 boxes, 20 books each, 400 total. If I sold one-half, 200, it was a break-even trip. If I sold three-quarters, 300, it was an *outstanding* trip.

Sometimes, I sold out—but that was usually too much to hope for.