

Close Encounters of the Strange Kind

By J. Michael Squatrito, Jr.

The summer moon rose from the horizon, providing enough light to allow me to deviate from my usual route. Zoe, my Australian Cattle dog, always enjoyed walking deeper into the woods instead of the usual asphalt neighborhood. The scents of the forest heightened her senses as we strolled further away from civilization.

“The moon’s big tonight,” I said, Zoe lifting her eyes to the heavenly body. “Not a cloud in the sky.”

My eyes gazed upon the multitude of twinkling stars through the open spots in the trees when suddenly I witnessed a flash zip overhead. Allowing my brain to process the sight, the light appeared more like a dull, bluish blur rather than a burst of brightness, I reasoned.

“Did you see that, girl?” Zoe lurched forward, straining her leash. I panned the general vicinity and, seeing no one, I unclipped her, allowing her to run free. Without restraints, Zoe darted ahead into the underbrush.

My eyes widened, thinking that setting Zoe free might not have been such a good idea. I hastened my step, following my canine companion as best I could, swatting away small branches and stepping around clumps of jutting vegetation. The moonlight aided my vision; however, I couldn’t see my dog. Furthermore, and more disturbing, I didn’t hear her either.

Gazing up ahead, I noticed a low light emanating from the woods. Silhouetted in front of the aura sat my dog. Strange, I thought. Shouldn’t she be barking? Stumbling through the woods, I found that Zoe had stopped at the edge of a small clearing. The soft glow grew with every step. Then I saw it.

Zoe turned her head upon hearing me, some ten feet from her position. The dog appeared to smile and her tail wagged on the ground. I looked past her and fixated on

the sight before me – a craft of some sort had landed on the small space between the trees!

Reaching the animal, with wide eyes and a churning brain, I said aloud, “What do we have here?”

The craft was black, smooth, and looked metallic. My brow scrunched and I cocked my head. “Zoe, it looks like a stealth bomber,” I said, absorbing the V-like wings, flat angled surfaces, and glass cockpit area. However, instead of landing gear the craft hovered above the ground, which gave off the soft blue hue. Then, the windshield dematerialized and a small figure levitated from the cockpit.

Zoe and I exchanged curious glances. The being touched down without a sound, then went about inspecting the underside of its vehicle. My eyes remained wide, staring at the strange scene that had transpired in front of me. The being suddenly stopped what it was doing, turned and faced me. It then started to take a few steps in our direction.

My body froze. The creature, this alien, stood about four and a half feet tall and looked every bit like the grays we had become accustomed to seeing in movies. However, its skin was not gray, but ... green. This intergalactic visitor mesmerized me with its large black eyes, bulbous head, and long arms, while it neared to about five feet from my position. Then, it telepathically spoke to me!

Raising its palms in my direction, the voice in my head said, “I’m not here to hurt you, abduct you, or probe you anally.”

My eyes widened a bit more, dumbfounded at hearing this alien’s voice speak to me without it moving its small mouth. “Why are you here?” I asked aloud.

The being’s shoulders slumped. “And here come the questions.” The creature shook its head. “I’m simply here on vacation.”

“What?” I exclaimed. *Vacation?*

“Yes, vacation,” came the telepathic response.

I leaned back in surprise. I hadn’t said the word “vacation” out loud, yet it read my thoughts!

Nodding, it said, "I can read your thoughts." Next, the diminutive being gazed toward my pet, its voice echoing in my head, "Nice to meet you, Zoe." I looked down at the animal in shock.

"It appears your dog has better manners than you."

What's happening here? "Um, my name is Mike," I stammered. "What's yours?"

Again the being waved its palms in my direction. "It's unpronounceable in your language, but you can call me Sal."

"Sal?" This creature that came from who knows where is named Sal?

"Doesn't that make it easier for you?"

I nodded. "Where are you from?"

Sal brought a four-fingered hand to his larger forehead. "You know the star at the end of the Big Dipper? Third planet from that one, just like yours."

"Really?"

"Yes, really." The alien peered over his shoulder, back to his craft. "I need to work on my spaceship. It's been nice talking with you." Sal then turned and started walking away.

"Wait!" I shouted. "I have so many more things to ask you!"

Sal's shoulders slumped, anticipating my reaction. "You humans," he started, shaking his head. "Either you want to kill us or you have an infinite number of requests." Waving his hand again, he said, "Follow me. We can chat while I work. Maybe you can even help."

My eyebrows rose high on my forehead. "Sure thing!" I exclaimed, a smile stretching across my face. "Why does your ship look like one of our military aircraft?"

"Seriously," he said, "you really believe that your people designed this vehicle?"

That stung. "What's wrong with your spaceship?"

Sal gestured toward the metallic object. "You can see it, right?"

"Of course," I answered, scrunching my brow. "It's right there."

"That's the problem."

"Your stealth drive's broken, isn't it?" I puffed my chest, sure that I had identified the issue.

"Sure, let's go with that," said the little creature. Pointing to a spot next to the vehicle, he said, "Stay."

I nodded and waited for Sal's next command. While my new friend went to retrieve something, I gazed at Zoe and swore she shook her head in disgust. Sal reappeared seconds later holding a gleaming instrument in his small hand.

"Hold this," he said, handing me a chrome-like object with a round, black button on its base.

What does this button do?

"Don't press that button."

"Ok."

I watched Sal maneuver under the craft where the soft blue emanated. He took an elongated finger and touched the surface, changing the glow to a bright green.

Extending his arm in my direction, he said, "Hand me the interdimensional elemental gauge reader."

"The what?"

"The shiny metal thing in your hand."

"Oh, right!" I said, passing the intergalactic baton to my interplanetary buddy.

Sal waved the instrument back and forth over the craft's underbelly, all the while symbols flashed on the tool's display. Next, the diminutive creature touched a small section of the ship's surface, sliding open a panel. Taking a long finger, he depressed a button, then inserted the interdimensional elemental gauge reader into an empty cavity. Red symbols flashed across the display, changing every split second. Moments later, Sal removed the device and slid the panel shut. Then, he gazed over to me.

Extending his arm, he held his mechanic's tool in my direction. "You want to press the button?"

My eyes widened. "You bet I do!"

I reached over and took the extraterrestrial device from Sal. The big black button stared back at me, beckoning me to press it.

“Go on,” said the voice in my head. “Do it.”

With nothing to lose, I depressed the black circle. In an instant, Sal’s spaceship disappeared! “What happened?” I exclaimed, searching for the missing craft. “Did you fix the stealth drive?”

Sal cocked his head back and forth. “Sure, let’s call it that.” He held his hand out. “I need my device back.”

Nodding, I returned the instrument to my alien friend. “Here you go.” Sal turned and began to walk toward the invisible spaceship.

Realizing that he wasn’t stopping, I exclaimed, “Where are you going?”

Sal faced me once again. “Time to get back to my vacation.”

“What kind of trip are you taking?”

The being’s voice echoed in my head again. “I’m going to visit wildlife on the Serengeti, the creatures that live there are mesmerizing, especially the elephants and rhinos.” After a pause, he continued, “Then off to the Mediterranean, probably Italy. The food there is terrific!”

“People are going to know you’re not human, you understand that?” Without even a flash, Sal transformed into ... Reese Witherspoon?

My mouth fell open. “How ... how did you do that?”

“Learned that trick from your very own octopi. Very intelligent creatures and so underappreciated by you humans.” Again, without even a blink of an eye, the beautiful actress transformed back to a little green alien.

“I must go now, but it was nice talking with you,” said Sal.

“Wait!” I said, before fumbling for my cell phone. “Can I take a picture of you?”

Sal shrugged. “Sure, why not.”

Adrenalin coursed through my veins. I whipped out my phone and focused on the little creature; however, something was wrong. “Can you make your spaceship visible again? People aren’t going to believe this!”

Sal pressed the button on his intergalactic instrument, making the vehicle visible again. I could barely contain my smile. I snapped picture after picture, assuming that ten shots were better than one.

“Thank you!” I beamed.

“My pleasure,” said Sal. “I really need to go now.”

I tensed and waited for the inevitable. “Are you going wipe my memory now?”

Sal shook his head. “No. This isn’t *Men in Black*.”

Relief washed over me, then a sense of sorrow. “Will I ever see you again?”

Sal took a step toward me, pointing in my direction. “The next time someone asks you out of the blue where you can find the best mangoes, remember me.”

I swear I saw him wink as the diminutive being turned and ascended into his spacecraft. Sal sat in his pilot’s seat, then secured the cockpit. I could see his large head through the windshield before a soft whirl lifted the craft upwards. The ship blurred briefly, then disappeared altogether. I gazed into the sky and noticed that the stars appeared fuzzy along the departing spaceship’s trail before twinkling again. Sal was gone.

My phone! Though the green alien had left, I still had undeniable proof of extraterrestrial existence! I brought up my Photos app and thumbed through each picture. Nothing! Only the clearing, trees, underbrush, and vegetation! No image of Sal or his spaceship appeared in any shot. I shook my head, not surprised.

Gazing back at Zoe, with a sigh, I said, “Time to go home. No one’s going to believe us anyway.”

Zoe led me away from the clearing, but before we left I gazed one more time to the heavens. “We’re not alone, Zoe.”

“No, we’re not,” she said aloud under her breath, too soft for me to hear.