

I blame Art Bell. He did this to me. ♦ Once upon a time I was a skeptic. ♦ "I'm so skeptical," I said, "I'm not even sure skepticism's such a great idea." I was so proud of that, and proud of myself for never having been duped by the "true believers" -- whom I pitied terribly for being such intellectual saps. ♦ I tuned into Art's late-night radio show -- midnight to god-knows-when on KFAB-AM (1110) -- as a harmless entertainment, like fireball preaching, wacko political ranting or (shudder) Dr. Laura; I wanted to know what the UFO geeks were up to. ♦ I found out, and it damn near killed me. ♦ All right, I made that up, but you know, staying up till 3:30 or 4 in the morning, every morning, can sort of take a toll on your mental health. ♦ Hey! Maybe that's how he did it, turned me into a raving Bell-iever. Yeah, Mind Kontrol, like the government does with microwaves! Call me Johnny Sleep Dep. ♦ But knowing I've been brainwashed, well, it doesn't exactly snap me out of it. I still believe, and for reasons I find hard to deny, even if it's true, Art has me in his diabolical power. ♦ More specifically, I've got a sneaky suspicion that this earth is being visited by beings from another continuity. ♦ I put it like that for a reason: I'm not sure where (or when) they come from. ♦ But let's look at the facts (or what passes for facts in this gray-marketplace of far-out ideas.) Let's play some Mind Games. ♦ These are just mental shoe-horns, slipping into your mind possibilities that would otherwise be sort of a tight fit -- to help you "get your head around" the Big Questions. ♦ **Imagine you represent a galactic level culture bent on exploiting, or otherwise interacting with, a planetary culture made up of intelligent animals with which you have, possibly, very little in common.** ♦ Because the vast distances of interstellar space make travel burdensome for living beings (talk about your jet lag!) you send a computer to gather initial data. ♦ The computer, once it comes close to the planet in question, sets up a permanent base nearby, say on that planet's moon, if it has one, and begins taking genetic samples. ♦ This is an absolutely necessary first step, the understanding of the animal in question in the context of its "animalness." ♦ Next the computer constructs biological tools for interacting with the animals themselves. The most efficient way to do this is to take the animals' genetic template and engineer it along lines that make it useful for your purpose. ♦ You want to make certain additions (adaptive to travel in near space, for instance) certain subtractions (you don't want your tools breeding all over the place or getting too uppity) and at the same time, you want the final product to resemble the original creature enough to make interaction as easy as possible. ♦ So the animals you are studying will think the "aliens" they are dealing with are an awful lot like themselves. ♦ If your animal is a laterally symmetrical biped with two grasping appendages and two optic receptors, well, you had better be sure to include these. ♦ Of course, some of the finer details may be lost on even an intelligent computer, particularly one developed by beings with radically different sensibilities than the animals it studies (an artificial mouse that looked exactly like a mouse would not fool a real mouse, that goes mostly by smell. But cover yourself with mouse smell, and suddenly you're one of the mice.) ♦ Little gray men, anyone? ♦ This scenario, once explored, allows for "aliens" that look as much like us as the "Grays" are said to, without them actually having to be the product of a laughable Star Trekian "parallel evolution" (you know, that's been one of my strongest objections to the alien stories current: there's no reason for "them" to look quite so much like "us.") ♦ **And talking about inter-dimensional travel** (we were talking about inter-dimensional travel, weren't we?). It turns out that some of the cutting-edge String Theorists posit an infinite (or something) number of universes, like bubbles in beer, and the possibility that, in the far future, we may create universes "in the lab" with which we might maintain a tenuous connection, a kind of life boat, in case this universe goes bad. ♦ Makes you sort of wonder, doesn't it? ♦ If you had a universe of your own, and you thought maybe one day you might want to go and live there, even as some kind of last resort, how would you manage it? I mean, you'd want a habitable planet, at least, and maybe a friendly slave race to worship and serve you. ... ♦ **And we've already sort of hit on time travel;** a traveler from another star system would also be a traveler through time -- space and time being, really, just aspects of one another, right? ♦ And maybe the best way to traverse such distances would be to slip between dimensions, like they tell us the electrons do. From point "A" to point "B," skipping the infinite number of dance steps in between. ♦ Just arrive where you want to go: fold the map so that any two points meet, and step across. ♦ But more conventionally, if we posit that time travel (namely communication in any form with the past) is possible, and we also posit the continuation of the human experiment, then at some point the discovery of time travel techniques becomes inevitable. Therefore time travelers are already among us. ♦ **Are you one of "Them"?** ♦ But, see, I don't have to accept UFOs, little men with a penchant for anal probes or any such nonsense to defend my thesis. It is possible that the beings I'm thinking of, or trying to (the ones from another continuity, remember?) aren't actually traveling bodily through space/time/extra-dimensionality to dally a while on this green orb. ♦ They could be doing something even more subtle and insidious. ♦ If you accept that matter is just a matrix of energy then the only difference between you and a raw electromagnetic field is the information your energy carries. ♦ Break down the word ("in formation"), and maybe you can see that you are just energy in a particular, dynamic form, energy impressed with and bearing information that turns it into atoms, cells, even memories and the thoughts you're thinking now. ♦ Well, that's easy isn't it? ♦ So if you want to travel the uncharted wastes of space, if you desire to move against the stream of time like a salmon headed home to roost, if someone says, "Hey, there's a hell of a fine universe next door. Let's go!" and you have the weekend off, why, if you know the trick, you just copy down the information that IS you and impress it on the energy where you want to go, beaming or broadcasting or otherwise phoning it in. ♦ And maybe you take advantage of the energy matrix already replicating itself over there. Get yourself born or just suddenly "wake up" inside the life of someone already living. ♦ Either way, wherever you go; there you are. ♦ Whether you know it or not. ♦ **In the coming weeks and months of our long slide into the next century we'll undoubtedly see more of this kind of weirdness.** As the madness of the millennium shakes our (pop) culture like a terrier shaking a dead rat, we can only expect that stranger and stranger stuff will be thrown off from the locus of that troubling nexus. (?) ♦ It'll keep Art Bell in business and, hey, that gives me another idea: ♦ If there ever are time travelers, well, you can bet they will be here, now, watching us writhe. ♦ In the mean time, maybe we can sell them some postcards. ...

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