

## Yoznok

According to legend, and several authoritative surviving reports from the event, the Yoznok spacecraft appeared in the sky over a small middle-Western city known as Tum-Wa in what was once one of the American states, late in the morning of August 19, 2049 YIG (Year of the Irrepressible Godman). At first everyone assumed it was a military craft, though it was shaped more like a silver school bus than one of the ubiquitous jet fighters popular in those times. An early eye-witness reported, “It didn’t sound threatening. It just hovered, and it made a steady, dull whoosh, like my shop-vac.”

By lunch-time, the Supreme Nasa reported the presence of a second, much larger object in a low Earth orbit. The official records are long lost, but surviving video commentaries reported it was “about the size of a super-WalMart and twice as thick.” It didn’t take much thought to conclude this was the mother ship, and the silver school bus was some kind of shuttle. One eye-witness was reported as saying, “It looks like an Airstream trailer, for gosh sake.” Another said, “Looks like a thermos bottle to me.” Unfortunately, most recorded images from those days have been lost, due to several hundred intervening upgrades in digital storage hardware.

Of course, the main question on that first day was simply, “Why are they here?” Endless wild speculation ensued, and reports indicate that a law was passed within a few days prohibiting unfounded theorizing on the subject. Within a week, however, after numerous abortive attempts at communication by the Supreme Nasa, a moderately satisfactory means of exchanging symbols was finally established. The initial translations

indicated that the aliens had indeed come for some specific purpose other than simple exploration. This, of course, was what everybody had assumed from the beginning.

Over the course of several days of clumsy discussions, communication evolved from crude computer-mediated pictograms to imperfect but fairly adequate bidirectional speech synthesis. With these improvements, the aliens' intentions became more clear. Their primary interest, it appeared, was to obtain assistance in collecting samples of all the different kinds of animals on the planet, just a few of each major species.

The Tum-Wa general population, and ultimately the global speculative consensus as well, concluded that to assemble a kind of interstellar zoo was a reasonable objective, if not more than a little flattering. Upon further reflection, the citizens of Tum-Wa and most other Western ethnic concerns concluded that the aliens must in fact be populating something akin to an ark or a "bioform collection," based on the alien's frequent use of substantive modifiers that translated as words like "rare," "unique," "multiply-differentiable," and (inexplicably) "tangy."

The Western ark theory briefly gave rise to related concerns that the aliens were evacuating a comprehensive collection of Earth life in anticipation of some dire, unspecified but unstoppable planet-wide cataclysm. Debate ensued as to whether said cataclysm would be a natural one, or perhaps something directly precipitated by the aliens.

The aliens themselves, however, were nearly spherical, with very short legs (six of them) and were colored a bright, almost luminescent pink. Their two arms were long and ropy, reminiscent of tentacles but fashioned from a half dozen elbows, and terminated with hand-like graspers comprising eight wiggly multi jointed fingers. They had no heads, but the upper portion of their bulbous torsos served as a sensory focal point, with two oversized bulging eyeballs, a disproportionately small pair of air-openings between them on a dainty pink protuberance, and a broad mouth that stretched across most of their girth in an unmistakably full-lipped humanoid smile that some less charitable reports called an "idiot grin." In short, it was difficult for most humans to take them seriously, in spite of their obviously formidable technological superiority.

By all reports, no evidence was ever found supporting the cataclysm hypothesis, and the popular ark theory was reinforced when the Yoznok

indicated they hoped three pairs of humans would volunteer to come along as well, “one of each kind in each of the dominant genetic strains.” After some weeks of awkward intercultural haggling, common in that era (which was characterized by literally hundreds of nation-states and several times that many languages), eventually three intrepid couples volunteered. These were the six brave folks whom we all know as the “alien-astronauts” from subsequent historically validated reports.

At the end of the collection process, over several weeks, pairs of animals of all types and sizes were amassed in a great holding area near the alien shuttle-bus outside the city of Tum-Wa. By this time, communication had improved, at last enabling the aliens to detect the confusion and agitation that lingered among the human communicators, arising from world-wide paranoia of an impending extinction-level event. The Yoznok responded immediately with a very reassuring public announcement that began, as transcribed from the only surviving analog recording of that period, “Bleepo, most please, of-Earth peoples, us bending in we-sorrow bleep forgiveness fright-error bleep non-tremble most notness.” Through repetition of various permutations of the same message, the head Yoznok was emphasizing that there would be no cataclysm, and no disaster was anticipated. Public trepidation persisted, but in much attenuated form.

A local Tum-Wa reporter wrote that as the last two elephants marched into the collection area for their trip up to the super-WalMart, a giant seawater tank arrived with the much-anticipated pair of blue whales. At that same moment the alien mother ship came down from orbit and hovered a few hundred feet above the field, making the same shop-vac sound as the shuttle-bus, but on a larger scale that the reporter likened to a WalMart-sized leaf blower.

At this point, gauging the relative scale of the animal collection area (which had taken over two large soybean fields) and the mother ship itself (not really much bigger than a regular WalMart), most onlookers immediately realized that the mother ship, though quite large, was nevertheless far too small to accommodate all the animals, let alone suitable habitats for them, their food supplies, etc., so they asked the aliens how they planned to care for them en route back to their home world.

To which the aliens replied, “Humor, oh bleep notness—majorly

understanding poop. No packship to home these acquisitions. All we eat here.”

The Tum-Wa reporter writes that the human spokesperson-ambassador then stood quite still, his mouth open, while the Yoznok delegation rotated 180 degrees and headed eagerly back to the shuttle on their numerous little feet.

The ambassador picked up his bull-horn, writes the Tum-Wa reporter. “Then what do you need the astronauts for?” he called, a question now arising in nearly everyone’s mind.

The last Yoznok stopped at the hatch, and called back through his wide idiot-lipped grin. “Dessert,” he piped.

The departure of the Yoznok, some nine days later, was as uneventful as its sparse coverage in the news recordings of the time. A wave of deep disinterest had spread round the globe, and for more than half a century little more was written or recorded about humanity’s first contact with an alien species.