

“Alien Abduction for Fun and Profit”

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It seemed like a good idea at the time.

When people ask me why I did what I did, that’s inevitably my answer. It hardly seems adequate, but no matter how stupid it makes me look, it’s the most honest response I can give.

Let me start from the beginning. My name is John Swaingo. I was supposed to get married on June 25, 2005.

Except I didn’t.

But I should go even further back, to a few months earlier. My fiancée Victoria and I were sitting in a Greek restaurant captive to the TV tuned to the Fox news channel. The entire time we were eating the talking TV monkey was jabbering on about some rich woman who disappeared the day before her wedding. We laughed and made fun of Fox news for covering such a moronic story and didn’t give it another thought.

Then, that evening, I was flipping through the channels and I saw the same bug-eyed picture of the missing woman I’d seen that afternoon. It was a minute before I realized I was watching CNN.

Apparently the stupidity had caught on like a virus. I flipped to MSNBC.

Same woman.

Same story.

Only now there was the added story of a rather hokey phone call the husband claimed to have gotten regarding a kidnapping. Within minutes the wolves they call “experts” were on that poor bastard husband like jackals on meat. They called him a murderer on the basis of nothing other than their passing fancy. One woman, the author of the book “Husband, Killer in Your Room” even speculated he might’ve already eaten her to hide the evidence of what was probably a ritualistic satanic murder involving cheese.

Of course it turned out that the bride was totally fine and the entire thing was a hoax. Apparently the bug-eyed lady was a bit of a loon. I thought this fact was apparent from the wide variety of pictures that showed her with a crazed, vacuous look on her face that brought to mind the phrase, “the wheel was spinning but the hamster was dead.”

Well, the runaway bride story must have gotten fantastic ratings because from that day forward there were new incidents every week. Women were ducking out on their husbands-to-be all over the country and the 24 hour news channels were covering the stories like they were the Fall of the Berlin Wall.

Helicopters, twice hourly updates, the whole media circus scene ran from one runaway bride to the next. Geraldo even tried to skydive into some poor guy’s backyard. He ended up stuck in an oak tree in the front yard and the fire department had to come and get him down.

It wasn’t like there weren’t other things to talk about, after all, there was a war on, poverty and hunger were still major problems facing millions of people, the President’s Chief of Staff was caught in a DC hotel room with a number of hookers and a donkey; but CNN, MSNBC, and Fox Propaganda were all focused on runaway brides.

So now we can jump ahead to a week before my wedding. Vickei and I were sitting at home when my local news station informed me the bug-eyed woman and her husband just got a half a million dollar book deal.

Just for getting cold feet.

A half a million dollars. That's 5 zeros.

I would have to work for twelve years for that kind of money.

The truth is- it wasn't the money that pissed me off, it was the book deal. I've written five novels over 3 years and I don't have a goddamn book deal. I can't even get an agent. Yet, these rich rednecks screw up and get themselves indicted and the next thing they know they're getting a contract from one of the largest publishing houses in America. The same publishing house, by the way, that's rejected all five of my novels.

Being a person, I couldn't help being a little jealous.

Being a writer of science fiction, this couldn't help but give me an idea.

After all, a husband could run away too.

Not that I had any reservations about marrying Vickei. Quite the contrary, I figured our love was strong enough that she would forgive me if I was actually dumb enough to do what started as the kind of "wouldn't it be funny if" idea no one actually goes through with.

Because all of the news coverage was focusing on women, I knew I would have to come up with something special in order to draw attention to myself. For some unknown reason when a guy disappears everything is fine and no foul play is suspected, but when a woman disappears everyone immediately assumes she's tied up in Hannibal Lecter's basement.

I thought of trying to convince Vickei to do the disappearing act, but in the end I decided against it because I didn't think she'd be willing to put her Mother through the trauma of a disappearance, even if it was faked.

Clearly I had no such compunctions, a fact my own Mother is rather fond of pointing out.

Besides, I didn't really want to go for the same crowd the bug-eyed lady's book would appeal to, I figured she and her hubby had that niche all filled up. I wanted to try a new take on an old gimmick. A National Inquirer story come to life live on the "news."

I could see the headline in my mind's eye, "Husband abducted by aliens the day before his wedding."

I knew I'd need an accomplice and after much thought I approached my friend Danny. He kept secrets and he could bullshit with a straight face better than anyone I'd ever met. I went over to his house, had a beer, and told him my idea. Danny was an enthusiastic participant and my idle thought quickly became a full scale plan.

Four hours later we'd bought some cheap new camping equipment, enough food for a week, and a large backpack to hold all my new gear. We paid all in cash so as to leave no trace that something sneaky was afoot.

I still remember the conversation Danny and I had at the mouth of the trail leading off into the forest the night before the wedding.

"So you're sure you really want to do this?" Danny asked, expressing doubt for the first time.

"I'm sure. In a sick world, sometimes being crazier than everyone else is the only way to get noticed."

As far as I was concerned, we'd gone this far, there was no point in turning back. I'd given Danny permission to tell Vickei the truth if it seemed like she was suffering too much, but I did ask him to keep the truth as secretive as possible and to not tell her unless it was absolutely necessary.

"Well I think you're crazy but I wish you the best of luck."

Danny got back into his car and drove away, leaving me alone. I considered turning back; calling Danny on my cell phone and having him come get me. Then I thought about the bug-eyed lady's book contract and turned on my heels. This was going to be my shot. After all, if you want to make a name for yourself you have to take chances.

Two hours later I was hot, my clothes were drenched in sweat, and I was happily in the middle of nowhere. On two separate occasions I saw other hikers coming in the opposite direction, in both cases I hurried off of the trail and hid in bushes. It was kind of funny hiding there because I knew if the hikers saw me they'd probably think I was dangerous, all hunkered down in the brush in the middle of nowhere. Thankfully I remained undetected.

I passed the first night without incident, I felt a little bad knowing Vickei was probably at home freaking out, but I tried to keep my eyes on the prize. By the second day I was thoroughly bored and wanted to go home and watch some TV or get my hands on a newspaper. For all my preparation I wasn't smart enough to grab a novel or a book of word jumbles. Instead, I just wandered aimlessly through the woods, keeping close enough to the hiking trail that I wouldn't get totally lost. I estimated that I was 20 miles from the nearest source of civilization. Near the end of that second day I found a very nice stream and decided to camp next to it.

It was the middle of the second night when the disturbance started. I was fast asleep in my tent when I heard a strange noise from outside. Cautiously I unzipped the window flap on the tent and stared out into the pitch black. I couldn't see anything, except there was a low buzzing noise that seemed to be coming from every direction at the same time.

Trying to convince myself I wasn't scared, I unzipped the door on my tent, grabbed my shoes, and went out to find the source of the sound. It didn't take me long to realize the task wasn't going to be easy. No matter how hard I concentrated I couldn't pinpoint a direction, in spite of the fact that the volume of the sound was steadily increasing.

I started to walk around slowly in a circle, my minor fear escalating to terror because there was one thing I was sure of and that was that whatever the sound's source, it wasn't something natural.

That was when an intensely bright light shot down out of the sky, so bright it was hot on the skin of my arms. I was completely blinded for at least a couple of minutes. When the little floaty lights finally cleared from my vision I knew something very much not right was happening.

The forest was gone, replaced with a small room with drab grey walls. There didn't appear to be any doors. I was in a cube.

More scared than I'd ever been in my life I called out, "Hello?" to the empty room, but I didn't get any response. I touched the walls, but I couldn't make out what they were made of, it seemed to be some combination of plastic and metal I'd never

encountered before. I knocked on it with my knuckles, but somehow they made no sound at all, not even the dull thud I was expecting. I tried yelling again, to no avail.

Meanwhile out in the world, Vicki had gone to the press at Danny's urging and my face was plastered on the CNN as a missing husband. Both of our parents had been interviewed and they were running our story to nearly saturation levels, apparently the cable news channels were looking for a new angle on the runaway bride story and the time for the switch to runaway groom stories had come.

Inside my mysterious prison I began to face the irony of what I thought was happening to me. I was running away to fake an abduction by aliens and had somehow managed to be abducted by aliens. The funny thing was, I didn't even believe in alien abduction, I always thought the people who actually believed in UFO's were kooks. Yet here I found myself, in a room that not only looked, but even *smelled* alien.

I tried yelling to be let out for a while again, but I still got no response. Then I decided it would probably be best to keep my mouth shut- I'd certainly heard enough about the anal probes that I didn't want to get on the nerves of anyone who may be watching me without my knowing it.

As time passed, fear gave way to boredom. I don't think most people realize how quickly terror becomes tedium. The adrenaline rush that comes with fear demands that something happen to keep the neurochemicals flowing, and when nothing does, your body basically forces you to calm down.

The adrenaline returned with a vengeance when a rectangular seam suddenly appeared in the wall and the heretofore invisible door suddenly slid away revealing a tall lanky grey creature.

It looked like a cross between ET and the thing from Predator with large almond shaped eyes that took up nearly half of its face and long dreaded hair that looked a bit like clumped together purple spaghetti.

More than anything I wanted to run, but seeing as I was probably on some kind of spaceship- I didn't know where I would go. It was clear they could hold me hostage for as long as they wanted so I figured there was no point in trying to make a nuisance out of myself.

Instead, I said the lamest thing anyone has ever said to an alien.

"Er, uh, Hi." I stammered, waving weakly and feeling like a complete idiot.

To my surprise the creature seemed to smile. "Hi." It said, imitating my wave with a hand tipped by fingers that had to be a foot and a half long.

"You are John Swaingo. You are famous." It said.

"What?" I asked, sure my ears were playing trick on me.

"You are famous. Your picture is on TV. It says you have run away. Why have you runaway? Your wife is very beautiful. If you are famous, why would you run away?"

I've never been more speechless in my life.

Not only was it talking English, it was telling me I was on TV.

And it thought my wife was pretty.

I certainly agreed with the creature's assessment about my wife's appearance, but I wasn't sure I was happy about it sharing my opinion on the matter. My complete astonishment at the creature's having any opinion at all on the subject of my wife's attractiveness quickly gave way to the feeling that I had to be in the middle of a hoax.

Then I thought about the way the door appeared out of nowhere and about the feel of the mysterious material my cell was made of and decided that no matter how strange I thought it was, it wasn't a hoax. Nobody I knew had anywhere near the budget to buy a big spotlight to flash on me in the woods, let alone a big elaborate setup like the one I would have to be in the middle of for the entire situation to be faked.

Just as I'd come to the conclusion that what was happening must be genuine, no matter how surreal, the creature asked another question.

"Do you know Brad Pitt?"

A picture of the movie star flashed onto a screen that suddenly appeared on the wall.

"We also like Adam Sandler and Glenn Close. Do you know them?"

"No. I'm not famous, I don't know anyone like that." I tried to explain.

"Yes you are. You are on 4 different television channels as we speak. There's no reason to be shy. We like celebrities." The creature assured me.

The monitor on the wall split into four equally sized screens, all of them showing a news channel with a picture of me taken in Florida the winter before. Damned if they hadn't tracked down a picture where I resembled a male version of bug-eyed girl. One screen flashed to Vickei, she was clearly in a great deal of distress and in spite of the fact I really had been abducted by aliens, I regretted my stupid decision to fake getting abducted by aliens.

I struggled with how to explain my attempted ruse to a celebrity-seeking alien and gave up before I even started. All I could think of to say was, "Oh that. I'm not famous, that's the news."

"Our scanners located you in the woods. It is very rare to find a celebrity so isolated- where's your entourage? Would you sign my autograph book?" The creature held out a flat panel screen to me with its long fingers. There was a pen of sorts sitting on top.

Not knowing what else to do I reluctantly signed my name on the pad.

"How about Danny Devito? Do you know him?" It asked.

"No." I said, brushing off his weird questions. I thought I would ask a normal one, so I said, "What's your name?"

As a response the creature made a sound I would equate to a mouse trying to vomit up an elephant.

"Nice to meet you." I stammered, not even attempting to replicate the name. I think I might have coughed up a lung if I tried.

Clearly uninterested in his own introduction, the alien pressed on, "Natalie Portman? Do you know her? How about Susan Sarandon? Jack Nicholson?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know any celebrities at all. I did once see the guys who played the Skipper and Gilligan at a restaurant, but that was like 15 years ago."

The creature's alien face did a marvelous job of representing disappointment.

"No celebrities?"

"I'm sorry, but no."

The creature brushed a long finger against the wall and again there was a bright flash of light followed by nothingness.

When I opened my eyes again I was sitting inside my tent back on the ground with absolutely nothing to prove that what I'd just experienced wasn't a figment of my imagination.

Naturally my first thought was to return home, so I packed up my stuff and headed straight down the path in the dark, the only light provided by the bobbing beam of my flashlight.

I didn't know it, but around the same time I was making my trek back to civilization my friend Danny was coming clean to Vickei that I was faking my disappearance to try to get a book deal.

Vickei was not amused.

She was so not amused that she called the media and the police and told them my intentions.

Of course I didn't know this at the time.

So my fake prank, that actually happened, that everyone ended up not believing- was a total bust.

No one believes me, not even Danny.

Not even Vickei.

It took me six months of begging and apologizing, but I did eventually get forgiven and married, but I never did get that book deal. Stupid aliens.

Hang on minute, my phone's ringing.

<<5 minutes later>>

Screw the book deal.

I'm making a movie!