

Adam-Troy Castro & Jerry Olton: The Astronaut from Wyoming

To understand Alexander, you must first understand his time.

It was an age when the universe had been opened for us. We knew how to look at objects a thousand light years away, and map the molecules that gave them form; we knew how things were put together and how they could be taken apart; we knew how the universe began and how it was likely to end. We knew how to reason, and how to discover, and how to add new pages to our increasing store of information.

It was also an age when ignorance was enshrined over knowledge. Every local newspaper contained a horoscope. World leaders consulted astrologers; psychic hotlines made millions; and a United States Senator gained ten points in the polls by claiming to have been in contact with Ancient Aztecs. We knew what comets were, where they came from, and what they didn't foretell . . . but in a compound in San Diego, thirty-seven intelligent, college-educated people took poison because they believed that a comet called Hale-Bopp would take them to heaven if they did.

In Alexander's age, we had knowledge . . . and we had delusion. And we preferred the delusion.

You cannot understand Alexander Drier's life without understanding that.

You cannot understand his final gesture without understanding that.

Of course, Alexander's time is still our time. Which is why some of you are most interested in reading about a high-ranking government coverup of alien experiments on pregnant human women.

I can't help what you want. I knew that going in.

But that's not what happened.

SPACE BABY SPEAKS FIRST WORDS AT BIRTH!

Warns of Threat From Space, Parents Say

The first tabloid reporter arrived in town one day after the birth, the first delegation from the networks right behind him. Not long after it hit the web, the pilgrims showed up. They came in motor homes, in vans, on motorcycles, and on foot: the four-man Sweethaven Sheriff's Office had to import a couple of dozen state police just to keep the kooks and the loonies and the just plain curious at bay. Most just wanted a glimpse of the child. A few—thankfully, very few—had darker things in mind; gene-splicing their mythologies, they arrived with rifles and pamphlets and hate-filled eyes, muttering black fantasies about an Antichrist seeded from the nonexistent Dark Side of the Moon.

I didn't get to meet him until his tenth birthday, but I can only imagine how frightening a time it must have been: Alexander's parents and the rest of the immediate family barricading themselves behind drawn curtains, looking out upon the steadily increasing madness of a crowd that seemed to represent all the rest of the world.

Alexander's mother, Faye, was so serene about the whole thing that she seemed to be in denial. She just held the baby and sang to him, making almost no reference to the mad scene just beyond the driveway.

"It's funny," she said at one point. "We don't know him, really. We don't know whether he'll be good or bad, smart or dumb, brave or afraid . . . the kind of things he'll be interested in or the kind of things that'll bore him silly. He's a stranger to us. An alien, for real."

Mark Drier winced as he glanced at the window. The blinds were drawn, but he could still see the crowds, growing larger every hour; some of them chanting, some of them singing, some of them shouting in rage. "Better not let them hear you say that."

Many years later, telling me the story, Alexander's Uncle George shook his head with awe as he remembered what Faye said at that moment: "Them? Who cares about them? They'll go away."

She was right, of course; the crowds began to diminish as soon as even the dimmest pilgrims began to realize that they weren't about to get beamed aboard any orbital crockery.

