

An Ordinary Day

By Travis Walton

Condensed from the book *Fire in the Sky*

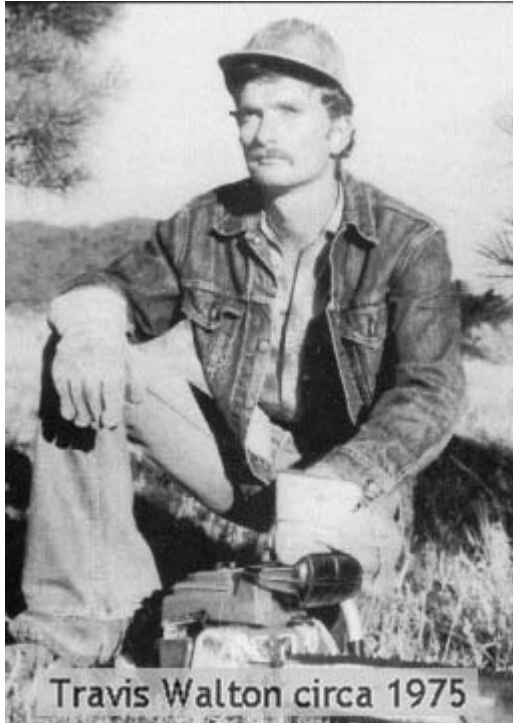


Photo courtesy Michael H. Rogers ©1978

It was the morning of Wednesday, November 5, 1975. To us, the seven men working in Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest, it was an ordinary workday. There was nothing in that sunny fall morning to foreshadow the tremendous fear, shock, and confusion we would be feeling as darkness fell.

We were working on the Turkey Springs tree-thinning contract. Basically, thinning involves spacing and improving the thick stands of smaller trees to allow for their faster growth. That day, November 5, we were cutting a fuel-reduction strip up the crest of a ridge running south through the contract. Fuel reduction is the process of cutting the thinning slash into lengths and piling it up to be burned in the wet season.

The boss, Mike Rogers, was twenty-eight, the oldest of the seven men. He had been bidding these thinning contracts from the Forest Service for nine years. That had been long enough to learn (the hard way) all the tricky pitfalls of the business. He was getting to where he could fairly consistently gauge the price per acre that would underbid the other contractors and still allow a profit margin. Turkey Springs was the best contract, profitwise, Mike had ever been awarded. In fact, it paid the highest acre-price he had ever received.

When we are piling, some of the men run saws while the others pile. I was running a saw, as were Allen Dalis and John Goulette. Dwayne Smith, Kenneth Peterson, and Steve Pierce were piling behind the cutters as we worked our way up the strip.

Dwayne Smith wasn't aware of it, but I had to be constantly careful to fell my trees so as to miss him. His inexperience, or maybe over eagerness, was causing him to work too close to me, instead of allowing a little accumulation of slash to put some distance between us. But at least he was trying.

I could not say the same for Steve. I could see Mike far back down the strip, restacking some sloppy piles to bring them up to specification. Steve took advantage of the boss's absence to rest his can momentarily on a handy log. He was ordinarily a good worker, but was a little disgruntled today because Mike had blamed him for some bad piles Dwayne had made.

I was trying to keep my distance from the other men, but we were coming together on a thick place to one side of the piling strip. The noise of my own saw is loud enough, even with earplugs, without revving all three of them in one spot. Just then I saw a shadow and jumped barely in time to escape a falling tree. I looked to see who had cut it. Allen. His mocking grin let me know it was no accident. I didn't let on that he had needled me. I moved farther up the strip to work. Allen always cut like a crazy man. He was a faster sawyer than anyone out there, even me. His speed helped acre-production, but it kept him from being up to working every day. His uncontrollable temper was probably what made him saw like that, taking his anger out on the trees. Allen had nearly come to blows with almost everyone on the crew, including me. He had a way of picking fights he never finished. Although our differences were forgotten as far as I was concerned, and we were friendly on the job, I suspected that Allen might have one or two lingering bad feelings toward me.

The afternoon sun was starting to cool as it began angling steeper down in the west. In the mountains, sundown comes early. It gets dark very quickly when old Sol slips behind the trees and out of sight behind the high ridges. The gathering chill was beginning to numb my nose. With summer ending, it was starting to get down to five or ten degrees at night. I worked a little faster to ward off the chill, eagerly anticipating the reprieve of the day's conclusion. Not long to go before we could head for home.

Sunset had been fifteen minutes earlier, but we kept cutting in the waning light. I checked my watch again. It was six o'clock at last! Mike was still down the hill a little way, picking up and repiling. I yelled and took the liberty of giving the stop-work signal. The sound of the saws died; the final echoes absorbed into the deepening dusk.

We loaded the chainsaws and gas and oil cans into the back of the '65 International. After arranging the gas cans so they would not tip over and leak on the bumps, Mike slammed the tailgate tightly. The decrepit pickup groaned on its tired old suspension as everyone piled in. There was Dwayne by the left rear door, Jown and Steve in the middle, and Allen by the right rear door. In the front, I sat by the door, riding shotgun. Ken sat in the middle, and of course Mike was driving. The seven of us usually sat in the same place every day. Nonsmokers in front, smokers in back.

Mike started the old pickup and we climbed north up the ridge toward the Rim Road. It was 6:10. Barring any breakdowns, we should be home before 7:30. We left the windows down so we could cool off some. We were still warm from laboring, in spite of the evening air. Mike, Ken, and I do not smoke and we prefer to inhale genuine, unadulterated air. The four in the backseat lit up as soon as we were in the truck, eager after hours without a cigarette. The fresh air coming in my window was bracing. We usually nap on the way to work every morning, but none of us ever feels drowsy on the way back to town. The rousing activity on the job hones a keenness that stays with us all the way home.

Bouncing over the water-bars in the road — humps of dirt that prevent the road from washing out in the rainy season — the truck kept bottoming out on its springs with a dull clunking sound. The fellows started cracking jokes about the pickup.

Just then my eye was caught by a light coming through the trees on the right, a hundred yards ahead. I idly assumed that the glow was the sun going down in the west. Then it occurred to me that the sun had set half an hour ago. Curious, I thought it might be the light of some hunters camped there — headlights or maybe a fire. Some of the guys must have caught sight of it too, because the men on the right side of the truck had fallen silent.

As we continued driving up the road toward the brightness, we passed in sight of it for an instant. We barely got a glimpse through gnarled branches before we rolled past the opening in the trees.

"Son of a . . ." Allen started.

"What the hell was that?" I asked.

My eyes strained to make sense of the glimmering through the dense stand of trees blocking our vision. From my open window, I could see the yellowish brilliance washing across our path onto the road another forty yards ahead. Intrigued, I was impatient to get past the intervening pines.

From the driver's seat, Mike could not look up with the proper angle without leaning way over, "What do you guys see?" he demanded curiously.

Dwayne answered, "I don't know — but it looked like a crashed plane hanging in a tree!"

Finally, our growing excitement spurred Mike into wringing out what little speed the pickup could still achieve on the incline. We rolled past the intervening evergreen thicket to where we could have an unobstructed view of the source of the strange radiance. Suddenly we were electrified by the most awesome, incredible sight we had seen in our entire lives.

"Stop!" John cried out. "Stop the truck!"

As the truck skidded to a dusty halt in the rocky road, I threw open the door for a clearer view of the dazzling sight.

"My God!" Allen yelled. "*It's a flying saucer!*"

Abduction



Image courtesy Michael H. Rogers ©1996

Mike shut off the engine. We watched, spellbound. The men on the left side of the truck leaned over so that they could see. There, a mere twenty feet above the ground, a strange, golden disc hovered silently. Our attention was riveted on that object poised in the air. Impaled by the sight, we were held transfixed for one long, silent moment that felt like an eternity.

The cold, jarring reality of what we were witnessing struck fear and awe to the core of every one of us. Suddenly beholding its vivid, magnificent structure summoned all emotions at once. You could almost hear our hearts pounding above that suspended instant of silence. Less than thirty yards away, the metallic craft hung motionless, fifteen feet above a tangled pile of logging slash.

The craft was stationary, hovering well below the treetops near the crest of the ridge. The hard, mechanical precision of the luminous vehicle was in sharp contrast to the primitive ruggedness of the dark surroundings. Its edges were clearly defined. The golden machine was starkly outlined against the deepening blue of the clear evening sky.

The soft yellow haze from the craft dimly illuminated the immediate area with an eerie glow. Under the weird light, the encircling forest took on bizarre hues that were very different from its natural colors. The trees, the brush, and the grass all reflected subtle, peculiar new shades.

I estimated the object to have an overall diameter of fifteen or twenty feet; it was eight or ten feet thick. The flattened disc had a shape like that of two gigantic pie-pans placed lip to lip, with a small round bowl turned upside down on the top. Barely visible at our angle of sight, the white dome peaked over the upper outline of the ship. We could see darker stripes of a dull silver sheen that divided the glowing areas into panel-like sections. The dim yellowish light given off by the surface had the luster of hot metal, fresh from a blast furnace.

There were no visible antennae or protrusions of any kind. Nothing that resembled a hatch, ports, or window-like structures could be seen. There was no motion and no sound from the craft. It almost appeared to be dead in the air.

I glanced from one to another stricken face. Turning back to that impelling spectacle in the air, I was suddenly seized with the urgency to see the craft at close range. I was afraid it would fly away and I would miss the chance of a lifetime to satisfy my curiosity about it. I hurriedly got out of the truck and started toward the hovering ship.

The men were alarmed by my sudden action.

"What do you think you're doing?" Mike demanded in a loud, harsh whisper.

Placing my feet quietly, I quickly stalked closer to the mysterious vehicle. Stepping over a low-leaning fir sapling, I carefully picked my way through the opening in the trees. I put my hands in my pockets in response to the cooler twilight air outside the truck.

"Hey, Travis!" the men warned insistently.

I stopped walking for a long, hesitant moment. I paused and turned to look back at the six men staring questioningly at me from the truck. The sober realization of what I was doing abruptly heightened the doubt I was already wrestling with. What should I do? I asked myself. Maybe I'm being foolhardy, I told myself. I won't get too close . . . but what if there's somebody inside that thing? I faltered. Finally I reassured myself with: I can always run away.

I was committed. Without replying to the guys, I resolutely turned and continued my brazen approach. I moved more slowly, cautiously covering the remaining distance in a half-crouch. I straightened up as I entered the dim circular halo of light softly reflecting onto the ground under the craft. I was about six feet from being directly beneath the machine. Bathed in the yellow aura, I stared up at the unbelievably smooth, unblemished surface of the curving hull. I was filled with a tremendous sense of awe and curiosity as I pondered the incomprehensible mysteries possible within it.

I had become aware of a barely audible sound coming from the ship. I could detect a strange blend of low- and high-pitched mechanical sounds. There were intermittent high, piercing, beeping points overlaid on the distant, low rumbling sound of heavy machinery. The strange tones were so mixed that it was impossible to compare them to any sound I could remember ever hearing.

"Travis! Get away from there!" Mike yelled to me.

I shot a fleeting look at the pickup parked in the road, then turned my attention back to studying the incredible ship.

Suddenly I was startled by a powerful, thunderous swell in the volume of the vibrations from the craft. I jumped at the sound, like that of a multitude of turbine generators starting up. I saw the saucer start wobbling on its axis with a quickening motion, in a pattern like the erratic spin of an unstabilized top. The same side continued to face me as the craft remained hovering at approximately the same height while it wobbled.

I ducked into a crouch when a tremendously bright, blue-green ray shot from the bottom of the craft. I saw and heard nothing. All I felt was the numbing force of a blow that felt like a high-voltage electrocution. The intense bolt made a sharp cracking, or popping, sound. The stunning concussion of the foot-wide beam struck me full in the head and chest. My mind sank quickly into unfeeling blackness. I didn't even see what hit me; but from the instant I felt that paralyzing blow, I did not see, hear, or feel anything more.

The men in the truck saw my body arch backward, arms and legs outstretched, as the force of the blow lifted me off the ground. I was hurled backward through the air ten feet. They saw my right shoulder hit the hard rocky earth of the ridgetop. My body landed limply and lay motionless, spread out on the ground.

"It got him!" Steve yelled.

Dwayne screamed: "Let's get out of here!"

"Get this son of a bitch moving!" Allen shrieked hysterically.



Image courtesy Michael H. Rogers ©1996

Mike did not need to be asked. He was already desperately groping, fumbling around for the ignition switch. His shaking fingers finally seized the key. The engine roared to life. Mike gunned the truck up the boulder-strewn track. He frantically spun the steering wheel one way, then the other, navigating the tortuous road.

"Is it following us?" he yelled over his shoulder. Nobody answered.

"Is it after us?" he shouted again.

When again no reply came, he turned to see the looks of stupefied shock on the faces of his crew. Their pale faces stared straight ahead, blankly. In reaction to the unbelievable horror of what they had witnessed, six hardened woodsmen were reduced to mindless terror.

Mike was fearful that the saucer was pursuing them. He put his head out the open window to try to see behind and was stung in the face by the sharp pine needles of a passing limb. He kept hitting boulders and other obstacles in his attempts to look behind. The erratically vibrating rearview mirrors only produced a blurred, flickering image, a faint yellow glow in the blackness. Goaded by a surge of terror, he stomped on the gas pedal.

The rattling truck shot forward at thirty-five miles an hour — far too fast for the condition of that road. A passing limb slammed into the right rearview mirror, bending it uselessly to the side of the truck. The old International went flying through the air over the dirt ramp of a high water-bar. As it landed, the pickup smashed down destructively on its weakened springs with a terrible crash.

The powerful jolt of metal on metal brought Mike to his senses. He was gripped by a sudden icy realization. If the truck broke down, they would be stranded and at the mercy of the unknown threat they were fleeing. He slowed the truck down to ten miles an hour. He was grateful to find the truck still working, capable of carrying them away.

The truck passed behind dense thickets of pine saplings, and the ship was once more lost from sight. In diverting his attention from his driving, Mike made the wrong approach to a water-bar in the road. It was the largest of them, and the last one before the Rim Road, a hundred feet farther on. Mike stopped the truck to back up and make another run at it.

"It doesn't look like it's after us," Mike shuddered as he shoved the gearshift into reverse.

The pause broke the men out of their shocked silence. They began to jabber hysterically. Instead of continuing over the obstacle, they sat there with the engine running. They struggled to collect themselves and decide what to do. Everyone was yelling at once, in a confusion of high-pitched shouting.

Mike anxiously asked: "I saw him falling back, but what happened to him?"

"Man, a blue ray just shot out of the bottom of that thing and hit him all over! It just seemed to engulf him." Ken's voice was solemn with awe.

"Good hell! It looked like he *disintegrated!*" Dwayne exclaimed.

"No, he was in one piece," Steve contradicted. "I saw him hit the ground."

"I do know one thing. It sure looked like he got hit by lightning or something!" Dwayne returned. "I heard a zap — like as if he touched a live wire!"

"Hey, men, we better go back!" someone said.

"No way, man. I ain't going back there!" said someone else.

As the men argued, Mike interjected. "Let's build a fire so the guys who don't want to go can stay here in the clearing while the rest of us go back there."

Just as Mike was about to get the gas out of the back, they were startled by the sudden approach of headlights coming west on the Rim Road. The dim outline of a camper-pickup could be seen passing in the dark.

"Let's go catch that pickup and get help!" John yelled excitedly.

Everyone piled in the right side of the truck. As Mike went around the driver's side of the truck, he exclaimed: "Look! Did you see that?"

The men scrambled to look. One of the men ran to the front of the pickup. "What was it?" he asked.

Mike told them he thought he had briefly seen the outline of the golden disc through the trees to the south. It had raised itself vertically to treetop level and streaked away toward the northeast at incredible speed.

They got in the truck. Mike angled the forgiving old pickup over the high water-bar and pulled out onto the Rim Road, heading west. The men argued on, rehashing what had happened. They were still arguing a mile down the road, where they reached the turnoff that went north to Heber. There, they finally worked their way around to the inevitable conclusion.

Mike turned the truck around at the turnoff. He said firmly: "This truck is going back. Anybody who doesn't want to come can get out right here and now, and wait! We've been acting like a bunch of cowards. We're all scared, there's no denying that, but we've got to do what we should've done in the first place!"

The embarrassed men no longer protested returning to the site. Even if any were still reluctant, they were ashamed to say so. Also, the prospect of waiting alone at the turnoff in the dark was much worse than going back together.

Their courage had been reinforced by the time and distance away from the site. However, as they turned left, off the Rim Road toward the original scene, their apprehension began steadily to rebuild. They began speculating on the dreadful possibilities of what they might find when they returned. The nearer they got, the more anxious they became.

"Hold it! It was right back there!" Ken exclaimed.

Somebody suggested pulling the truck around and pointing the headlights toward the log pile above which they had seen the hovering ship. They backed up and pulled in, driving over the fir sapling leaning in the way. Their eyes searched the area illuminated by headlights.

They found nothing.

"We're just going to have to get out and look around," said Mike.

They searched first in the security of the headlights. Everybody stayed together, huddling close to Mike, who carried the only flashlight. The flashlight beam probed into the night, examining every dark shape. They searched behind every log, bush, and stump. They called repeatedly: "Travis! . . . TRAVIS!!" Except for their calls, the woods were deathly quiet. They searched farther north, as Allen had suggested. They searched beyond the crest of the ridge and farther south. They found no sign anywhere — no foreign objects or unusual markings. No burns, pad impressions, or disturbed ground. Not a trace of tracks and no evidence of a struggle.

The longer they continued, the more worried Mike became, more overcome with emotion. He stumbled, then stood, looking down struggling to control his feelings. The loss of his friend, his guilt at driving away, and the pressure of the leadership being demanded of him all became too much to bear for a moment. Finally, Mike managed to regain his composure. "Okay, you guys, we're not doing any good here. Let's go!"

They got in the truck and began the long drive back to Heber. The memory of what they had so recently witnessed left them with a spectrum of strong emotional reactions.

Then Ken voiced the one thought they had all avoided so far. "We're gonna have to tell the authorities about this."

The Aliens

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Condensed from the book *Fire in the Sky*

"Ugngng . . ." I moaned silently. My first glimmer of slowly returning consciousness brought with it the single overpowering sensation of pain.

"Oh, damn!" I gritted my teeth against the agony. The excruciating ache almost caused me to lose consciousness again. I felt badly burned, all over, even inside me.

I was lying on my back. I didn't try to move or even to open my eyes at first. I was weak, so watery-weak, that I knew if I attempted to move even my arm I'd lapse back into unconsciousness. A bitter, metallic taste covered my tongue. My mouth was dry and I was very thirsty. Oddly, the weakness in my muscles did not seem to come from hunger. The trembling felt odd, like a strange mixture of exertion and illness. Something was terribly wrong.

I sluggishly dragged my eyelids open. I could not see anything. Then a blurred image began to coalesce. My eyes struggled against the agony. My sight shifted in and out of focus. My vision slowly became clearer. The hazy scintillations of light gradually solidified into an image. I could make out some kind of light source above me.

The fixture was a luminous rectangle about three feet by one and a half feet. The diffused light came from the flat, frosted surface of the rectangle. For an instant I could distinguish the brushed metal luster of a ceiling in the softer, reflected glow above the light. The fixture seemed to be suspended lower and closer to me than the ceiling. I deduced from the nearness of the ceiling that the hard flat surface I was lying on was a raised table of some kind.

What's the matter with my eyes? I asked myself. The ceiling is all crooked. It's too small on this end and too large on that end! Were my eyes playing tricks on me? I closed them against the discomfort, but soon opened them again to ward off the feeling of vertigo that welled up in me. The odd-shaped ceiling was indeed as I had perceived it: generally triangular, with the base toward my feet.

What a weird place! I reflected wonderingly. I had been hurt. Yeah, that was it! . . . But what? I could remember straightening up and feeling as though somebody had whacked me with a baseball bat.

Suddenly, the memory of what happened before I'd blacked out came rushing back with stunning impact. I remembered standing in the clearing in the woods looking up at the glowing saucer!

Where in hell am I? . . . Oh my God — the hospital! They brought me here to the hospital! I thought.

It was very hot and humid. The heavy air was almost stifling. It smelled slightly stale and muggy. I was sweating; warm moisture beaded my temples. Feeling my jacket bunched up under my arms, I wondered why a nurse had not removed it. I still had all my work clothes on, even my boots, and the jacket was just too warm. I must be injured so bad there wasn't time to take off my coat, I thought. Maybe I was in an emergency room of some kind.

Then I felt something pressing down lightly on my chest. It felt cool and smooth. I looked down and managed to hold my eyes open long enough to see that my shirt and jacket were pushed up around my shoulders, exposing my chest and abdomen. A strange device curved across my body. It was about four or five inches thick and I could feel that it extended from my armpits to a few inches above my belt. It curved down to the middle of each side of my rib cage. It appeared to be made of shiny, dark gray metal or plastic.

I looked past the upper edge of the device. I could see the blurry figures of the doctors, leaning over me with their white masks and caps. They were wearing unusual, orange-colored surgical gowns. I could not make out their faces clearly.

Abruptly my vision cleared. The sudden horror of what I saw rocked me as I realized that I was definitely not in a hospital.

I was looking squarely into the face of a horrible creature! It looked steadily back at me with huge, luminous brown eyes the size of quarters.

I looked frantically around me. There were three of them! I struck out at the two on my right, hitting one with the back of my arm, knocking it into the other one. My swing was more of a push than a blow, I was so weakened. The one I touched felt soft through the cloth of its garment. The muscles of its puny physique yielded with a sponginess that was more like fat than sinew. The creature was light and had fallen back easily.



Image courtesy Michael H. Rogers ©1996

I lunged unsteadily to my feet and staggered back against a utensil-arrayed bench that followed the curve of one wall. I leaned there heavily, keeping my eyes riveted on those horrid entities.

My action had caused the device across my chest to crash to the floor. No wires or tubes connected it to me, or to anything else. It rocked back and forth on its upper side. The rocking sent shifting beams of greenish light out onto the floor, from the underside of the machine.

My aching body would not do what I told it to. My legs felt too weak to hold me up. I leaned heavily on the counter. The monstrous trio of humanoids started toward me. Their hands reached out at me.

With the superhuman effort of a cornered animal, I ground out the strength to defend myself. Fighting the splitting pain in my skull, I grabbed for something from the bench with which to fend them off. My

hand seized on a thin transparent cylinder about eighteen inches long. It was too light to be an effective club. I needed something sharp. I tried to break the tip off the tube. I smashed the end of the glasslike wand down on the waist-high metal slab I had been lying on. It would not break.

I sprang into a fighting stance with my legs spread wide to brace for the attack. I lashed out with the weapon at the advancing creatures, screaming desperate, hysterical threats. The creatures slowed but continued toward me, their hands outstretched.

"Keep back, damn you!" I shrieked menacingly.

They halted. In a snarling crouch I held the tube threateningly back behind my head. I felt hopelessly trapped. I was surrounded, with my back to the wall.

They stood still, mutely. They were a little under five feet in height. They had a basic humanoid form: two legs, two arms, hands with five digits each, and a head with the normal human arrangement of features. But beyond the outline, any similarity to humans was terrifyingly absent.

Their thin bones were covered with white, marshmallowy-looking flesh. They had on single-piece coverall-type suits made of soft, swedelike material, orangish brown in color. I could not see any grain in the material, such as cloth has. In fact, their clothes did not appear even to have any seams. I saw no buttons, zippers, or snaps. They wore no belts. The loose billowy garments were gathered at the wrists and perhaps the ankles. They didn't have any kind of raised collar at the neck. They wore simple pinkish tan footwear. I could not make out the details of their shoes, but they had very small feet, about a size four by our measure.

When they extended their hands toward me, I noticed they had no fingernails. Their hands were small, delicate, without hair. Their thin round fingers looked soft and unwrinkled. Their smooth skin was so pale that it looked chalky, like ivory.

Their bald heads were disproportionately large for their puny bodies. They had bulging, oversized craniums, a small jaw structure, and an underdeveloped appearance to their features that was almost infantile. Their thin-lipped mouths were narrow; I never saw them open. Lying close to their heads on either side were tiny crinkled lobes of ears. Their miniature rounded noses had small oval nostrils.

The only facial feature that didn't appear underdeveloped were those incredible eyes! Those glistening orbs had brown irises twice the size of those of a normal human eye's, nearly an inch in diameter! The iris was so large that even parts of the pupils were hidden by the lids, giving the eyes a certain catlike appearance. There was very little of the white part of the eye showing. They had no lashes and no eyebrows.

With all the screaming and the hysterical questions I had thrown at them, they never once said anything to me. I did not hear them speak to each other. Their mouths never made any kind of sound or motion. The only sounds I heard were those of movements, and my own voice.

Just as I girded myself to spring at them, they abruptly turned and scurried from the room! They went out the open door, turned right and disappeared. The anticlimax of their retreat was incredible. The extra adrenaline that had squirted into my bloodstream left me trembling uncontrollably. I collapsed back against the bench, struggling to slow my racing heart. I gulped the heavy air in ragged gasps.

Afraid of the aliens' return, I looked toward the door. No sign of anyone. I needed something better to defend myself with. I noticed an array of strange instruments lying on the bench. The instruments were arranged near the middle of the bench, leaving either end of it clear. There was nothing I recognized, but some of the chromelike objects reminded me of those in a laboratory or doctor's office. All of the objects were too small to be effective as weapons. I was more afraid of *being hurt by* some of those instruments. I touched nothing more, throwing the clear tube I still held down on the floor.

I've got to get *out* of here, I thought frantically with a surge of determination.

There was a curving hallway about three feet wide outside the door. The ceiling of the hall gave off a faint, almost unnoticeable illumination. I looked to the right down the narrow, dimly lit passage in the direction the aliens had run. There was no one in sight.

Seeing nothing in the passage to my left, I began walking that way. I broke into a frightened run down the narrow corridor. The cramped hallway turned continuously in a tight curve to the right. I dashed past an open doorway on my left without looking in, only ten feet down the hall from the door I had just exited. I caught a glimpse of a room but was afraid to stop.

Wait just a damn minute, Travis! I struggled to get a grip on my self-control. What if I missed a chance at that doorway to find a way out of this place? I saw another doorway ten more feet ahead on my right. I slowed down to a walk as I neared it.

[Home Page](#)

Human?

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The door was only a few feet ahead on my right, on the inside curve of the hallway. I slowed down, turned, and stopped in the opening.

I looked in cautiously. I saw a round room about sixteen feet across with a domed ceiling about ten feet high. Equally spaced around the room were three rectangular outlines resembling closed doorways.

No one there. The room was totally empty except for a single chair that faced away from me.

I looked behind me. The hallway was still empty. I slowly entered the room. I hesitated to approach the high-backed chair. There might be somebody sitting in it that I could not see from behind.

I circled, keeping my distance from the chair, checking to see if anyone was sitting in it. I followed the curve of the wall to get around to where I could see. I was ready to beat an instant retreat if I should see one of those hideous creatures again. I stopped every few steps to crane my neck over the back of the chair. Seeing nobody, I continued around to where I could ascertain, with much relief, that the chair was unoccupied.

Glancing apprehensively toward the open door, I slowly went toward the chair. As I gradually approached it, a very curious thing began to happen. The closer I got to it, the darker the room became! Small points of light became visible on, or through, the walls, even the floor. I stepped back and the effect diminished. I stepped forward and it increased again, the points of light becoming brighter in contrast to the darkening background. It was like the stars coming into view in the evening, only very much faster. The matte gray of the metal wall just faded out to be replaced by the glinting, speckled deep-black of space.

I looked at the controls on the chair. On the left arm, there was a single short thick lever with an oddly shaped molded handle atop some dark brown material. On the right arm, there was an illuminated, lime-green screen about five inches square with a lot of black lines on it that intersected each other at all angles. Under that, a square of approximately twenty-five colored buttons arranged in about five vertical rows with one color for each row. I looked for symbols or written words and found none.

The experiment I was considering was risky, but I was desperate. Maybe one of those buttons would open a door or something. On impulse, I went ahead and pushed one of the green buttons. I looked around the room and listened carefully — nothing happened. When I pushed the button, I noticed that the lines on the screen had moved. I recklessly pushed another green one. The lines rapidly changed angles, slid down each other, then stopped. I pushed some of the other colored buttons. Nothing happened. Nothing moved and no sound could be heard.

Trembling, I sat down on the hard surface of the chair. I put my hand onto the molded T-grip of the lever. The handle was slightly small for my hand. The whole chair seemed a little too small. I rotated the handle of the lever forward, feeling the slow, fluid resistance of it. I felt suddenly disoriented as the stars began moving downward in front of me, in unison. Quickly I pulled my hand off the lever, which returned to its original vertical position. The stars stopped moving, but remained where they were when I released the lever.

If this thing is flying, I could crash it or throw it off course and get lost or something! I resolved not to tamper with those controls anymore. I might escalate a desperate situation into a fatal disaster.

I got out of the chair and walked to the edge of the room. As I did, the stars faded out and the surfaces of the wall, ceiling, and floor came into sight. I moved over to one of the rectangles resembling closed doors. I searched the edges for a sign of a switch or an opening mechanism. Seeing none, I put my eye to the crack; I could not see any light. I looked around for some kind of symbol or writing that would help me figure out where I was or how to get out of there. None.

I walked back to the chair and stood beside it, looking at the buttons. I was thinking about pushing some of them, when I heard a faint sound. I whirled around and looked at the door. There, standing in the open doorway, was a *human* being!



Image courtesy Michael H. Rogers ©1996

I stood frozen to the spot. He was a man about six feet two inches tall. His helmeted head barely cleared the doorway. He was extremely muscular and evenly proportioned. He appeared to weigh about two hundred pounds. He wore a tight-fitting bright blue suit of soft material like velour. His feet were covered with black boots, a black band or belt wrapped around his middle. He carried no tools or weapons on his belt or in his hands; no insignia marked his clothing.

I ran up to him, exclaiming, babbling all sorts of questions. The man remained silent throughout my verbal barrage. I was worried by his silence. He took me firmly but gently by the arm and gestured for me to go with him. He led me out of that room and hurried me down the narrow hallway, pulling me along behind him due to its narrowness.

He stopped in front of a closed doorway that slid open, into the wall. I did not see what caused it to open. The door opened into a bare room so small it was more like a foyer or section of hallway. The door slid shut quickly and silently behind us. Again I attempted to talk to the man as we stood there. No answer.

We spent approximately two minutes in the metal cubicle, no more than seven by five by twelve feet. Then a doorway, the same size as the other door and directly opposite it, slid open.

The brilliant warm light that came through the opening door into the airlock-like room was almost like daylight in color and brightness. Fresh, cool air wafted in, reminding me of springtime in the out-of-doors, making me realize just how dark and stifling that place had been. What relief that fresh air was! The air moved around me in a softly fluctuating current. I stood and inhaled deeply the clean, cool breeze. The last tinges of the ache in my head and chest almost completely disappeared. I had nearly forgotten the discomfort that had been with me constantly since I had regained consciousness.

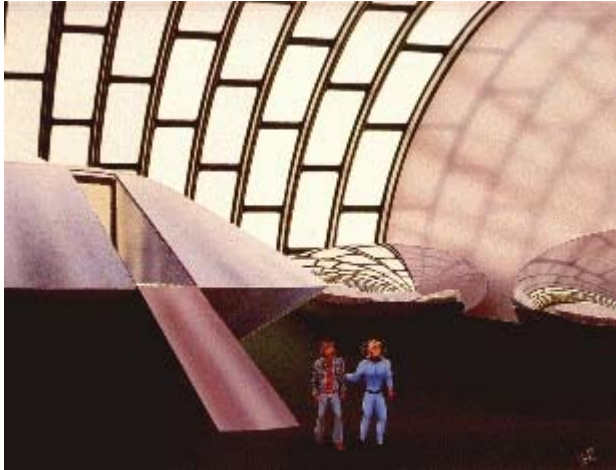


Image courtesy Michael H. Rogers ©1996

I descended a short, steep ramp seven or eight feet to the floor. I looked around to discover that, although I was outside that dim, humid craft, I was not out-of-doors. I was in a huge room. The ceiling was sectioned into alternating rectangles of dark metal and those that gave off light. The ceiling itself curved down to form one of the larger walls in the room. The room was shaped like one-quarter of a cylinder laid on its side.

The outside of the craft we had just left was shaped like the one we had seen in the woods, but was very much larger, about sixty feet in diameter and sixteen feet high. It did not emit light; instead it had a surface of shiny brushed-metal luster. It seemed to radiate a faint heat from its hull. The craft either sat flat on its bottom or, if it had legs, they were only a few inches high. It sat nearly in the middle of the large room.

On my left, toward one end of the large room, there were two or three oval-shaped saucers, reflecting light like highly polished chrome. I could see two of them very clearly, and a silvery reflection that could have been another shiny, rounded craft. They were about forty or forty-five feet in diameter, quite a bit smaller than the angular vehicle I had just come out of. I saw no projections or breaks in the smooth, shiny, flattened spheres. They sat on very rounded bottoms and I could not see how they balanced that way.

The man escorted me across the open floor to a door that opened silently and quickly from the middle outward. We were in a hallway about six feet wide, illuminated from the eight-foot-high ceiling, which was one long panel of softly diffused light. The hallway was straight and perhaps eighty feet long. Closed double doors were distributed along the corridor.

At the end of the hallway, another pair of double doors. I watched closely this time. I did not see him touch anything, but again the doors slid silently back from the middle. We entered a white room approximately fifteen feet square, with another eight-foot-high ceiling. The room had a table and a chair in it. But my interest was immediately focused on the three other humans!

Two men and a woman were standing around the table. They were all wearing velvety blue uniforms like the first man's, except that they had no helmets. The two men had the same muscularity and the same masculine good looks as the first man. The woman also had a face and figure that was the epitome of her gender. They were smooth-skinned and blemishless. No moles, freckles, wrinkles, or scars marked their skin. The striking good looks of the man I had first met became more obvious on seeing them all together. They shared a family-like resemblance, although they were not identical.

"Would somebody *please* tell me where I am?" I implored. I was still utterly shaken from my encounter with those awful creatures. "What in hell is going on? What is this place?"

They didn't answer me. They only looked at me, though not unkindly. One man and the woman came around the table, approaching me. Silently they each took me by an arm and led me toward the table. I didn't know why I should cooperate with them. They wouldn't even tell me anything. But I was in no position to argue, so I went along at first.

They lifted me easily onto the edge of the table. I became wary and started protesting. "Wait a minute. Just tell me what you are going to do!"

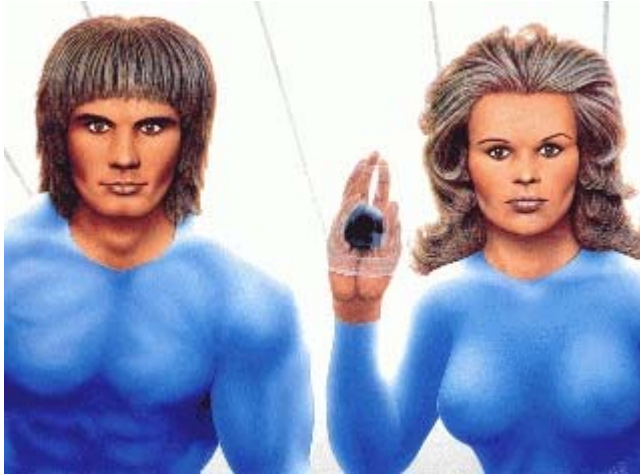


Image courtesy Michael H. Rogers ©1996

I began to resist them, but all three began pushing me gently backward down onto the table. I looked up at the ceiling, covered with panels of softly glowing white light with a faint blue cast.

I saw that the woman suddenly had an object in her hand from out of nowhere — it looked like one of those clear, soft plastic oxygen masks, only there were no tubes connected to it. The only thing attached to it was a small black golfball-sized sphere.

She pressed the mask down over my mouth and nose. I started to reach up to pull it away. Before I could complete the motion, I rapidly became weak. Everything started turning gray. Then there was nothing at all but black oblivion . . .

Return

By Travis Walton [Buy the book](#)

Condensed from the book *Fire in the Sky*



Image courtesy Michael H. Rogers ©1996

Consciousness returned to me on the night I awoke to find myself on the cold pavement west of Heber, Arizona. I was lying on my stomach, my head on my right forearm. Cold air brought me instantly awake. I looked up in time to see a light turn off on the bottom of a curved, gleaming hull. As I'd raised my head up, a white light caught my eye just before it blinked off. Either a light had been turned off or a hatch had closed, cutting off the light from inside. I only caught a glimpse as I raised my head; I could not be sure which it was.

Then I saw the mirrored outline of a rounded, silvery disc hovering four feet above the paved surface of the road. It must have been about forty feet in diameter because it extended several feet off the left side of the road. It was too large for the highway and it extended past the roadside to my left to clear a cutaway rock embankment on the other side of the highway. It appeared to be about fourteen feet high in the center.

For an instant it floated silently above the road, a dozen yards away. I could see the night sky, the surrounding trees, and the highway center line reflected in the curving mirror of its hull. I noticed a faint warmth radiating onto my face. Then, abruptly, it shot vertically into the sky, creating a strong breeze that stirred the nearby pine boughs and rustled the dry oak leaves that lay in the dry grass beside the road. It gave off no light; and it was almost instantly lost from sight.

The most striking thing about its departure was its quietness. It seemed impossible that something so large, moving through the atmosphere at such speed, would not have shrieked through the air, or even broken the sound barrier with a sonic boom. Yet it had been totally silent!

I scrambled shakily to my feet. My legs felt rubbery. I swayed, then caught my balance. I looked around and recognized the deserted stretch of curving road as the highway that wound down the canyon into Heber from the west.

I ran wildly down the deserted highway, across the bridge into Heber, stopping at the new building across from the Union 76 service station. No one answered my desperate knocking. No cars passed by.

I ran down the highway, over the second bridge, to the row of telephone booths at the Exxon station. I dialed the operator — a dime was not required to reach an operator in our part of the country — and panted out the number of my sister. She was the only nearby relative with a telephone.

My brother-in-law Grant answered. It was 12:05 A.M.

I was in an incredible mental state, difficult to describe. As best I can remember, I shouted something like: "They brought me back!" Then I babbled, "I'm out here in Heber, please get somebody to come and get me!" My hand shook as I held the cold receiver.

Grant was not amused. He took this call to be another cruel joke. "Uh, I think you have the wrong number," he replied sarcastically, starting to hang up.

"Wait! It's me, Travis!" I screamed hysterically into the receiver.

"Where are you?" he asked, still suspicious of a joke.

"I'm at the Heber Exxon station."

"Okay," he replied, almost apologetically, yet still cautious of a prank. "Stay right there. I'll come and get you. Just hang on."

Grant drove the three miles from Taylor over to Snowflake and found my brother Duane at Mom's house. He told Duane about the call, and of his doubts it was really me. Duane, too, thought the call might have been yet another example of someone's idiotic concept of humor. But they decided they couldn't risk not investigating. They set out for Heber, thirty-three miles away.

Lights suddenly shone into the phone booth. Relief flooded over me when I raised my head and saw the headlights of Duane's pickup. Duane and Grant got out and came to where I was still slumped in the phone booth. Duane opened the glass door of the booth and helped me to my feet.

"Am I ever glad to see you!" Grant said.

Duane helped me into the warm truck and asked Grant to drive. On the way to Snowflake I tried to tell them about what happened to me, but I just couldn't get it all out.

"They were awful — white skin — great big eyes . . ." I sobbed in horror.

"Take it easy, Travis, you're all right now. They didn't harm you, did they?"

"No . . . but those eyes, those horrible eyes! They just kept *looking* at me!"

"Just so you're okay, that's all that counts," Duane said. "Everyone has been worried sick about you."

"If it's already after midnight, I must have been unconscious for a couple of hours," I replied shakily. "Because I only remember about an hour or an hour and a half inside that thing."

Duane and Grant looked at me strangely.

"Travis, feel your face," Duane said.

"Good hell, I just shaved this morning and it feels like a week's growth!" I exclaimed, still not comprehending.

"Travis," Duane said gently, "you've been missing for *five days!*"

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