

UFO Pulp Fiction for the Modern Mind

Aliens Got My Sally

LEE BALDWIN

For my mother and father.

It is western women who will change the world.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Chapter 1

Sally Trips

QUANTUM BIOLOGIST SALLY JACOBS will discover how freaky the universe can be when a corner of it opens up and swallows her whole. That won't be because she took a few minutes at the campus café, or because that made her late to observe tonight's lunar eclipse with a friend. It won't necessarily be because she follows this deserted shortcut to avoid the shadowed parking lot where carousing fratboys smash car windows, or because of the towering rebreathers that roar against urine-tinted sky.

Sally's fate will unfold in part because four out of five infants on this overheated planet are born dead, because half of all humanity goes to bed starving, and because like everyone else, she wears a breather mask to keep the poisoned atmosphere from killing her.

Focused on leaving a voice message for her friend, she doesn't notice the little raccoon in the twilight until she's almost on it. The raccoon is very cute. Sally halts, a smile tugging at her lips. The animal is playing with a yellow ball, which is now rolling toward her. With a sense of the weirdcute, she reflexively toes the ball in the raccoon's direction. The animal bats it toward her, but not hard enough.

Because Sally is a biologist to her core, she is fascinated with this intelligent behavior, and by the fact that the raccoon has green eyes. But most wildlife has died off, so how does this

one survive out here with no breather? She steps forward to kick the ball.

The little face remains unreadable; it ignores the ball as its delicate, clawed hands manipulate a crystal cylinder. The air around them shimmers gold.

Clouded in incandescence, Sally tries to retreat. But when she finds herself unable to move, paralyzing fear rises to choking terror. She vanishes from the ordinary universe, along with the green-eyed raccoon and every living bacterium within 20 meters, *hating, hating, hating* it that her only part in this cosmic discovery is that of the screaming blonde.

Chapter 2

Abandoned

WITH A SOUNDTRACK of harsh breathing and squeaky court shoes, Anna Lewis takes an elbow from a scraggly guy as she drives across polished boards, twisting under another dude for a decent layup. Elbow-jerk steps across her to take it outside, but Anna flips his foot behind his ankle and down he goes. Hoots and catcalls from others on the court, all guys, not all of 'em Anna's height. She smirks and clamps down on the pain in her ribs.

Play. In the next mad down-court dash, Anna sees the Archaeology admin spearing a finger at her from low in the empty bleachers. The other team makes a shot and Anna steps out.

"Director's office," the woman says. "Stat-stat."

Anna hefts her gym bag, pulls on her breather mask and shoves through the air seal into drab evening light. She curses the cloud cover. She's meeting Sally to view tonight's eclipse, even though it could be a washout.

Dribbling her basketball, Anna runs among shadowed university buildings. The Archaeology Department director, her thesis advisor, wants to talk. It damn well better be green lights from her doctoral committee. Her degree after five long years of post-grad means she'll dump this campus of boy-men and her misogynist advisors and find her way to a good position in

computational archaeology. Somewhere else. She's breathless to tell Sally that her degree is in the bag.

Anna runs underneath a howling rebreather tower, deafened as it huffs away at the yellowed air. Tops of similar towers are visible between buildings, stacks of dark carbon briquettes at their metal feet. Along the path, bright info panels sense the med bracelet she wears, and target their messages to a fertile female of 28 years, above-average height, intelligence, and physical fitness: contraceptives, feminine hygiene and uterine implants, party drinks, hot booty shorts, and that no-permit StunVixen immobilizer all the hotties carry. A strident verbal command orders her to walk, don't run on campus paths. The dazzling screens make up for the sketchy lighting between university buildings.

Anna charges a gaggle of tobacco zombies clogging an entrance. Toggled out in wildly-painted breather masks, they mill uncertainly to let her through. One rouses at sight of her flashing legs and sets himself for a quick grope. She eludes his questing fingers with a head-fake and crashes through the building's air seal.

In the Advanced Studies wing, she ducks down a side corridor among blocky office cubicles. Three bearded Ph.D. candidates in a heated whiteboard discussion eyeball her as she zips into a shared cube and frees her phone from its Krypto-Kradle. Seconds later she pulls her breather aside and knocks at Professor Mumford's office door. His muffled reply sounds through the steel barrier. Full professors get bulletproof everything on this campus.

Facing him across the desk, Anna doesn't bother with anything lame like, 'You wanted to see me?' She drops her basketball and traps it underfoot, meeting his eyes with expectant silence. Mumford gives her damp shirt a slow pass.

"Wet T-shirt contest, Lewis?"

Professor Carl Mumford is such an expert misogynist his look can feel like a pat-down. Anna catches herself from saying, *I'm up here*, but allows a flicker of annoyance at his cobby maleness.

"You've heard from the committee," she says mildly.

Mumford leans back in his big chair. "Do you know we're living in poverty, Lewis?"

"Poverty?" Anna forces herself to hold steady. He likes to begin his little chats with something irrelevant.

"You ever spend any time looking at the stars?"

Anna only nods, impatient to move on to Topic A, approval of her thesis. She sends Sally a quick text: *Whrarya?*

"When my father came to this seacoast," Mumford says dreamily, talking mostly to himself, "the stars at night were a hundred times brighter. As a kid, I built a telescope. Thought I could bring them closer. Your kind doesn't miss that because you've never seen it."

"My kind?"

"You've worn a breather all your life. So young. You're secure in the knowledge that this is the way things are."

"What the bleep you talking about?" Anna doesn't feel she's all that young anymore, not after the delays and red tape of the last five years.

"This is not the world, Lewis. This is a pissed-on scrap of what we had."

Anna's nostrils flare at the lecturing tone. "I love looking at the stars."

"You've never seen them."

"Online," she protests. "Hubble, James Webb, Tess. Armstrong..."

"With your own eyes, Lewis. I know you want to. You climb the hills late at night. Damn risky, even for a jock like you."

"Life's a dangerous adventure or it's nothing," she says firmly. "My friend comes."

"You two gals? Alone up there at night?"

She gives Mumford a stony silence. It's seldom shared with men the literal combat training women must undergo to survive in modern society. Anna Lewis is the kind of woman that some men find easy to hate because of her star-girl looks. Tall and fit and 25 years younger, Anna knows she could take him.

"Lewis, someday the world will realize that the human race has never been alone in the cosmos. It's 2084 and all we've really got, deep-space-wise, are telescopes."

"We'll always have UFOs," Anna growls, impatient with his small talk, hungry for the best news of her life.

"UFOs are real," Mumford says in his lecture-hall voice. "Have always been real. Exoplanet tech is real." He considers her for a moment, a calculating smirk on his weathered face. "If you had brain one as a researcher, you would ditch your voodoo search for alien mine shafts. Your best work points to astronomy."

"I think we do great astronomy when we dig into the ground," she tells him firmly. "Stuff that's real about our origins."

"You did that. Your alien mining theory. "But don't you have any juice to study planets around other stars?"

"Good astronomers already doing that. Besides, you approved my topic." Anna steps down hard on her rising impatience. She's more interested in unnatural subsurface deposits than stellar spectra and radio signals. And this convo is boring as hell to a woman who wants to light out for a saner part of the country.

Mumford shakes his head emphatically. "We are stalled on critical technology barriers. Hydrogen fusion for cheap electric power is still 15 years away..."

"They were saying that 90 years ago."

He nods. "Taxpayers and congressmen have no appetite for space travel. All we can show for a century of launches are footprints on the Moon. And sixty-three dead colonists orbiting Mars."

"A Mars colony is doable. It's all politics holding us back," Anna says. "Not technology."

Mumford is unimpressed. "This plot you generated." He hooks a thumb at the monitor behind him, one of her arty-colorful plots of possible pre-humanity mining operations. Over the top of that window she catches the corner of a random newsblog: *Woman Gives Birth to Live Human Head*. She jerks her attention back to him, thinking he's about to tell her she screwed up.

"You're keeping me in the dark about something," she says, feeling he's rehearsed this, maybe in front of a mirror. "To start with, exactly when is my paper on alien mining locations coming out?"

When she arrived on this campus five years ago, she'd described to him her methods for locating unnatural anomalies in subsurface metal and mineral deposits, her cloaked term for mining operations before the rise of Homo Sapiens. He'd told her she'd publish faster if he became her co-author. That paper and several in its wake have met with odd little snags in the academic approval chain. Mumford gives her a smug frown.

"Forget that paper. When we lucked onto some funding, I took the liberty of running with your first results." He doesn't mention he took that minor liberty three years ago.

Anna cannot suppress a gasp. "Professor! You used my estimates to open a dig site?"

He flashes his most winning smile. "Carl, please, my dear. Not professor. I'm your friend, remember?"

Soothing her impatience by rolling the basketball underfoot, Anna's face is a mask. He is no friend of hers, although the rumors he spreads claim much more in the way of intimacy.

"We owe you for this, Lewis. There's a little dig project in Colombia that I've launched to investigate one of your proposed mining sites."

Anna kicks the basketball hard against the front of his steel desk. Mumford jumps at the enormous boom in the small office. She traps it underfoot and snarls, believing at this moment she'd be justified to snap his fool neck.

"You deliberately ripped off my original work to get funding for a fat project! That is academic theft!" Even as she glares at him, it crashes in on Anna that this meeting is not about her degree.

"Sandoval's getting results," he says. "He needs you down there pronto."

"They want me down there," she says numbly. Her stomach sours at the idea of a camp-out in the mountains of Colombia with two dozen stubbly excavators. "Forget it. I'm interviewing. Send someone else."

Mumford's eyes go hollow and Anna's throat tightens. This jerk of an advisor actually wants to yank her world out from under her.

"You should be proud. It's really your dig."

"Then why am I finding out like this?" She strokes a small gold locket at her throat.

"This is academia, Lewis. Your subsurface heat maps guided Sandoval to something of interest. You need to see it *in situ* before they disturb it."

"He can send video. We'll settle it in five minutes."

"You're going."

"Bet me!" Anna's got that gut-sick feeling, but Mumford is unperturbed. In a whisper, he says, "Couple months ago, NASA showed me a star chart."

"That means exactly what to me?"

"A view of this galaxy we'll never see from Earth." He leans back casually in his big chair. "That star chart came out of your encoded lattice algorithms."

Now she is interested. Extracting lattice data from an early Colombian sculpture is the core of her doctoral thesis.

"There's no way you could get that."

"NASA's computing power has turned up more from your methodology than star charts."

Anna places both palms on his desk and leans in. "Hold it, Carl. First you take my alien mining heat maps to launch a dig. Now you've got NASA running my lattice algorithms. You've leaked my thesis to the government?"

"Calm down, girl." He gives her a Lothario smile. "It's all under wraps."

Nerves prickling, she says, "then bring up that star chart. I want to see the other side of the galaxy." Her pulse picks up. All her life, Anna's held to the belief that extraterrestrials have visited Earth, not only in modern times but in the distant past. She wants to believe that one day humans will encounter a spacefaring culture. Hopefully it will be one that's conquered insanity. She has doubts about how humanity will handle that.

Mumford shakes his head. "It's all at the dig site. Sandoval can show you. Too sensitive for electronic transmission."

"Courier, then! Has to be a better way to do this. I got..."

"Plans, Lewis? Your eyes on this dig right now are mission critical."

"Forget it. I'm reporting you. Using your position to perpetrate a theft."

Mumford's lips curl as he lobs his bomb. "You're not reporting anyone, Lewis. I'm doing you a favor. The committee rejected your thesis." Before she can protest, he adds, "We thought things were fine, until your paper pulled that p-flag."

Anna's guts turn to liquid. She was expecting something about how warmly the doctoral committee regards her original work, how they see her bound for a bright future. But now her committee chair is charging her with the most serious academic crime. Plagiarism.

"My work did definitely not get p-flagged! It's completely original. Only my quoted sources..."

Mumford ignores her. "You'll have two months in Colombia to gather your wits and do a careful rewrite. It's perfect cover for a delay. Blame it on Sandoval's project. You'll come back looking like a hero and I'll bless your thesis. And you, little girl, will keep your stupid mouth shut."

Anna fights for breath. "Work nights while fighting off Sandoval's drooling felons?" Her knees go weak, her every nerve screams that this cannot be true. His arrogance and insults are one thing, but academic probation is a black mark that will taint her entire career.

"Here's your plane ticket and a student visa." He flicks a legal size envelope across the desk. "You leave from Arcata airport in three hours. Tick-tick-tick."

The bottom drops out of Anna's stomach, even as she's chewing on the fact he said student visa instead of work visa. She finally gets it, the reason for Mumford's unaccountable stalling on their supposed co-publication of her alien mining probability maps. He wants to make her invisible.

"Tough about the thesis," Mumford says in a consoling tone. "I know you'll work it out."

She plants her feet and pulls out the long-standing lie she wears as battle armor. "Todd and I are ready to start our family." Even as she says it, she cringes at how feeble it sounds.

"Whadaya want, Lewis? Diapers or degrees? You're the most field-seasoned archaeologist in the University."

Anna's eyes flicker to the 'human head' story on his monitor but she's too awash in anger to let it register. Mumford gives her a lame-ass smirk.

"This is what you need right now, trust me."

She grits her teeth until her jaw trembles. Sick that she's marginally giving in, she says, "I'd need an international med bracelet."

From a drawer, Mumford pulls out a factory-wrapped medical compensator bracelet. Her name's printed on the box. She scans the pharma code. It's all there, including her estrogen-dopamine balancer, good for thirty days.

Deep breath. "This is good for a month. Then I'm back and I'm done."

When he looks up, there's a streak of blood below her left eye. Mumford's one of the few who's seen her do this. It freaked him then and it freaks him now. He softens his tone. "A month, then. Do this thing right and we might arrange a government placenta for you guys. How is good old Todd?"

Resisting the urge to smear the redness across her cheek, Anna realizes it's decided. The route to her degree will be crawling through a bug-infested Colombian jungle. Hating that she's being forced, once again, to serve this idiot's whims, Anna fights to hold steady, reaching deep down for fresh resolve as she always does. To keep herself from going full nuke on this

black hole of a thesis advisor, she picks up her ball and slams out through his office door.

Where to Buy *Aliens Got My Sally*

I subtitled this book *UFO Pulp Fiction for the Modern Mind* for two reasons. First, I was looking for a “modern” reader (smarter and more educated), who might be ready to go beyond the old UFO tropes. Second, I wanted to provide a look at what human society could look like in the far future. I am talking billions of years.

Where to Buy

You can buy *Aliens Got My Sally* in eBook format from the following online booksellers:

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Premise For The Story

I found the premise for the story while thinking about the Drake equation, that product of strange-seeming terms that is supposed to estimate the number of intelligent civilizations in our galaxy. It struck me that this estimate is based on independent emergence, therefore the equation cannot predict the expansion of a single species to many planets. I wondered, what if life develops infrequently, but finds its own ways to expand across space, which might include the rise to great intelligence and methods of travel we've yet to imagine. In this vision, the Cuz Folk were born.

So, what if a spacefaring species half the age of the current universe did visit Earth in the deep past? Bent on protecting their own far future, could they have influenced our planetary biology and could we therefore be their genetic cousins? With these assumptions, the human race would be a relatively primitive branch of a hyper-evolved galactic civilization. I thought that situation interesting enough to form the premise of this book.

Because of rapid star aging in the early universe, significant amounts of organic and metallic compounds necessary to biological life could have first blown across space in a timespan as short as three million years. The Milky Way galaxy where our planet spins in darkness is nearly as old as the current universe. This means that intelligent life could have

appeared in our tiny island 13 billion years ago. What could such species be like today? Could they have progressed through a post-biological state of existence into a non-material one, and departed this universe to seek out a different physics? What if those beings control physics itself, through a hyper-evolved consciousness?

And can there be some structure or dimension along which unnumbered universes coexist, separated by the smallest quanta of distance? And what if there are spatial dimensions our philosophies never guess at, occupied by living beings? And just suppose that such civilizations exist across multiple dimensions of time and space and are aware of us, yet conceal themselves from even our imagination.

And just maybe, certain spatial dimensions are not perfectly invisible to one of ours, leaving flickering shadows on our eyelids as living beings there go about their lives.

There are many other questions from my reading of physicist and cosmologist Paul Davies, theoretical physicist Beatriz Gato-Rivera, physicists Alan Guth, Brian Greene and spiritual cosmologists Rupert Sheldrake, Deepak Chopra, Roger Penrose, et al.

Paul Davies' key skill seems to lie in asking the right questions. Two of his books, *The Eerie Silence* (2011) and *The 5th Miracle* (2000) were instrumental in leading me to a deeper understanding of how the universe works. Davies' clear scientific reasoning and insightful questions helped me elaborate the search which Anna Lewis undertook in this novel, and the bedrock of what she found.

I'd like this story to remind us that with all of our supposed technological promise, we are much influenced by fear, and by its psychotic conjoined twin, hatred. Can we as a species

secure our future? Do you think, as in this tale, we will actually be rescued? Will we feel pride in needing that?

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Ashland, Oregon

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About Lee Baldwin

I've been a single-engine pilot, a glider pilot, amateur race driver, windsurfer and skateboard rider. Because I survived all those, I now throw myself bodily onto the mercies of the English language. I love the intricacies of story, and figuring out what makes a story work.

A novel is like a pinball game. Once the shiny new character lurches into motion, it encounters the bumpers and flippers of the plot and bounces wildly off, tracing out the unique path of tension and surprise we call a story. A thrill dispenser wired to your neural architecture. For the author, it's an even bigger gamble.

Stuff

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