

# **Starchild : Alien or Human**

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The Starchild skull is the skull of a child who died around 900 years ago. It is severely malformed and its appearance has led some people to suggest that it is of extraterrestrial origin. UFO believers suggest that the strange appearance of the skull supports the theory that the child was a human/alien hybrid. Further support for their theory has come from DNA tests on the skull, which have yielded a range of inconclusive results. The DNA tests show that the child had a human mother, but the results seem to indicate that the father was not human. Other tests, however, have indicated that the child's father was, in fact, human, but UFO believers overlook this fact and continue to test the skull in search of evidence to support their alien origin theory.

On April 24th 2009, Television New Zealand's Breakfast show presented an interview with Lloyd Pye, one of the leading supporters of the extraterrestrial origin theory. The segment portrayed the extraterrestrial origin of Starchild as a real possibility, which I thought was irresponsible. It was an unbalanced interview, and did not address any of the competing explanations for the strange appearance of the skull. Normally I would ignore such coverage, but I was distressed to see it on a well respected nationwide breakfast show. The problem with presenting Starchild on this programme is that it reaches a wide audience who may accept the UFO claims as fact. Its presentation on the programme was biased, and for this reason I have decided to write this essay

to weigh the possibility that Starchild is part alien against the possibility that it is fully human.

So, what are the chances that Starchild had a non-human father? There are a number of conditions that would need to be met for us to take this possibility seriously. Let's consider some of these conditions.

### **What if life has emerged on other planets?**

In a vast universe it is probable that life *has* emerged on other worlds. The famous Drake equation estimates the probability that life exists on other worlds as relatively high. Drake assumes that if a planet is able to support life, then life will almost certainly emerge. He also estimates that half of all stars have a system of planets, and that in each of these systems a total of two planets will be suitable for life. So, according to this popular equation, the likelihood of life emerging elsewhere in the universe is very high.

On the other-hand, arguments have been put forward that show the probability of life emerging elsewhere is extremely low (see Ward and Brownlee 2000). The so-called "Rare Earth" hypothesis suggests that the number of factors required to give rise to life is so high, and their probability is so low that life is very rare in the Universe. Furthermore, because of its rarity, given the size of the universe it is extremely unlikely that any other species would anywhere close to visiting distance.

### **What if life on another world was based on DNA?**

Let's take the more optimistic approach and assume that life is relatively common in the universe. We now need to ask whether life on other worlds

could be based on DNA. This is an important possibility to consider in the case of Starchild, because the claim is that Starchild came about through a human / alien union. Such a union could only work if the alien was a DNA based life-form. Now, since we only have knowledge of one system of life (namely life here on Earth) it is difficult to imagine other systems upon which life could be built. DNA is how it all works here, but there may be a multitude of other possibilities. It may turn out to be an extremely low probability that DNA based life exists on other worlds. This is a question that science will continue to explore, but in the meantime, it is risky to make the assumption that life elsewhere is DNA based.

### **What if genome sequences in alien life are compatible with sequences found in Earth bound species?**

Suppose that DNA based life *has* emerged elsewhere in the universe. There is still the requirement that its genome sequences correlate to the genome sequences of life here on Earth. There may be millions of different ways to encode genes to serve the purpose required to build the creatures we see on Earth. An analogy is to look at computer software. There are many different ways to build a program that behaves like Microsoft Word, and from an end user's point of view there would be no discernible difference between the different programs. The same is true in genetics. There are many ways to build living creatures, so to suppose that a DNA-based life-form from another world will have a human compatible genome is a huge, and unjustified leap.

### **What if extraterrestrial life evolved to look Human?**

The likelihood of this depends on many factors. I think there is an extremely low probability that life on other worlds would evolve to have a human

appearance. Life on Earth turned out this way through a gradual step-by-step selection process, which was determined by evolution's solutions to adaptive problems. Creatures on Earth suit their environmental niche, but this is just one way it could have turned out. There are a multitude of other possibilities in evolutionary *design space*, and life on Earth could have turned out totally different. Creatures that emerge on other worlds will also evolve to suit their environments. They would almost certainly look and behave in astoundingly different ways to anything on we see on Earth. Astronomer Carl Sagan once theorized that if life had emerged on Jupiter, the creatures that live there could be gigantic floaters, 50 kilometers in diameter, drifting high up in the planet's atmosphere (Sagan, Druyan, Soter 1980). Of course, life has not been discovered on Jupiter, but his point was that life evolves to suit its environment. Life elsewhere is bound to be extremely different to life here on Earth.

### **What if an alien species achieved interstellar travel?**

The development of interstellar space travel would be quite an achievement. The main problem with traveling between star systems is the immense distance involved. Using an ion-drive propulsion system, it would take a ship around 80,000 years to travel from Earth to the nearest star-system. Ion-drive is a relatively recent development and is more economical than conventional rocket powered technology. It does, however, take a long time to accelerate to high velocity. It is obvious that interstellar space travel would require a different type of technology—a technology that would allow ships to travel at close to the speed of light, and even at light speed, only trips of short distances would be worth making. A ship traveling at light speed may arrive at its destination relatively quickly from the point of view of its crew, but their friends and family left back at home would age many years before they return. This is a ramification of Einstein's relativity theory, which states that time

progresses at different rates depending on your speed and proximity to a gravitational field. For example, traveling at the speed of light from here to Proxima Centauri would be extremely quick from point of view of the astronaut, but from the point of view of people left on Earth, 4.5 years would have passed.

Achieving such speeds would require technology that we are nowhere near developing, so visitors from other star systems would have to be significantly more advanced than us. This begs the question, why would such an advanced civilization want to come to Earth to have sex with human females?

### **What if the super-advanced alien visitor had no moral problems with attempting reproduction with another species?**

As an intelligent species, we have developed a system of morality. This is unique among humans, and has undoubtedly contributed to our success as a species. Our morality provides us with a set of guidelines, which compel us to treat other people (and animals) with respect. As time passes, our moral systems evolve. By the time we achieve interstellar space travel, we will have highly evolved moral systems. In fact, it would be difficult to see how we could work together to achieve goals such as interstellar space travel if we didn't have highly developed moral systems. So, wouldn't it be safe to assume that interstellar visitors from another world would also have a highly developed sense of morality? And if they did have a developed moral sense, wouldn't it seem unlikely that they would want to reproduce with a member of another species? An alien mating with a human would be the same as a human trying to reproduce with a gorilla—an idea that we find morally abhorrent. Some may suggest that the aliens would want to mate with a human in order to satisfy some sort of scientific curiosity, but I would argue that such an advanced

species would have the ability to answer questions about reproductive compatibility by analyzing genes rather than having to physically mate.

### **What if the alien's method of reproduction was the same as ours?**

It never ceases to amaze me how much people "humanize" things. The simple assumption that an alien *could* reproduce with a human is far-fetched and based on an anthropomorphic point of view. Species on other worlds would likely reproduce in unimaginably different ways. Sexual reproduction may be common on Earth, but it is not the only way to reproduce. In fact, many Earth species reproduce *asexually*, which does not require fertilization. To suppose that a species from another world would reproduce sexually is an arrogant human assumption.

### **What if the alien was compatible with a human and could produce offspring?**

The odds of this are extremely low. Even if the alien was a DNA based life-form, and even if its genome was similar to the genomes of Earth-bound species, the chances that it could produce a viable offspring is extremely low. Earth species can't interbreed—even species that are closely related can't reproduce. Humans cannot reproduce with Chimpanzees, so it seems extremely unlikely that a species from another world would be able to reproduce with a human.

## **Why humans?**

Out of all the life on Earth, why would the alien choose to reproduce with a human? Why not a chimpanzee? Why not a gorilla? Why not a fish, or a lizard? To suggest that the alien would want to reproduce with a human is an arrogant assumption.

## **Weighing the odds**

Now, there are a lot of “what if’s” listed above, which rational people should find problematic. But to emphasize the point I want to make, here’s another “what if”:

*What if babies are sometimes born with birth defects?*

This is a “what if” that we can test the truth of by looking around the world. Out of the billions of people on Earth, some have various types of birth defect. We read about it in the news and see it on TV because its uncommon, but it does happen. And look, there’s evidence that at least one birth defect occurred around 900 years ago.

Looking at the Starchild skull rationally requires us to consider the likelihood of the competing possibilities. Think about your past experience and understanding of the world and weigh the possibilities. What’s more likely? 1) That a super-advanced alien visited Earth 900 years ago and mated with the inferior human species; or 2) That 900 years ago, a child was born with a birth defect. When faced with competing possibilities, it is generally best to go with the simplest option and in this case, that should lead us to the conclusion that Starchild was a human with birth defects. The first option—that Starchild had an alien father—is not impossible, but the number of conditions that need to be satisfied for this to be true make it an unlikely scenario. I therefore urge

anyone who encounters Starchild believers to remain rational and not buy in to the myth that these people continue to propagate.

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### **Further Information**

Interview between Paul Henry and Lloyd Pye on "A Skull with Alien Origins".  
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