

UNIDENTIFIED FE

In The Last Few Years, The In

RN

By Robert Ferrigno

UFOs, THOSE mysterious, pesky speedsters from the void, have become part of our popular culture since their first modern-day sighting in 1947, objects of fear and fascination which reveal more about us than the UFOs' point of origin.

In the last 36 years, we've gone from frantically watching for an outer space invasion force to welcoming the little aliens with open arms and open mouths. Here's how it happened.

On the afternoon of June 24, 1947, Kenneth Arnold, a businessman from Boise, Idaho, was flying his Cessna in the Cascade Mountains around Mount Rainier in Washington. That day Arnold claimed to have seen nine "disc-shaped" objects the size of airliners, flying at speeds he estimated to be in excess of 1,000 miles an hour. Arnold described the objects to reporters as "like saucers being skipped over the water."

Within months hundreds more of the saucers were reported sighted all over the world. In the Soviet Union flying saucers were officially "flying sickles."

While UFOs had been sighted for centuries — some contemporary writers have suggested that the prophet Ezekiel's visions of celestial "wheels within wheels" in the biblical book of Daniel may have been a UFO — Arnold's experience is now considered the first modern-day appearance of the saucers.

The timing couldn't have been more perfect.

The post-World War II period was marked by suspicion, a sense that betrayal and sneak attack were imminent. The Russians, our former allies, had taken Eastern Europe; China, another former ally, had gone Mao-Mao, and in June 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea.

Back home in the U.S. Senate, Joe McCarthy was announcing the infiltration of Reds and Pinks into the Defense Department; it was *j'accuse* speeches before the TV cameras and guilt by the color wheel.

The UFOs were right on time. They were like the ultimate Commies: devious, secretive, murderous and armed with secret weapons. It was the Golden Age of Paranoia. The watchwords of the 1950s were "A Red under every bed!" and "Watch the skies!"

The classic UFO movies of the '50s played on this theme of aliens-want-your-soul-and-maybe-your-job.

In "Invaders from Mars" (1953), a Martian saucer landed in the secluded sand dunes near a housing development, set up a covert underground base — see J. Edgar Hoover's "Masters of Deceit" — abducted clean-living Americans and turned them into vacant-eyed zombies. The same thing happened in "Invasion of the Body Snatchers" (1956), in which pods from outer space took over the persons of loyal Americans and turned them into shambling collectivist husks of their former Rotarian selves.

The only UFO film of this era that presented aliens in a good light was "The Day the Earth Stood Still" (1951). In this film, a kindly alien, played by Michael Rennie, landed in Washington, D.C., and offered us peace and galactic brotherhood. He also had a huge robot sidekick, Gort. Gort could destroy the Earth without straining a transistor.

A soldier shot and wounded Michael Rennie. It seemed like the thing to do. Rennie, in true turn-the-other-alien-cheek manner, told Gort, "Gort, klaatuu barada nikto," which

stopped the robot from making hamburger out of every federal employee from the president on down.

"We are the MYSTERIANS, what we want we take!" — "The Mysterians," Japanese science-fiction movie, 1959.

The Japanese added the next major development to the archetypal UFO movie. They had as much reason to be paranoid about the future as anyone and realized that any real invasion threat had to include the specter of "Foreign Devils Need Women!" — call it the G.I. Hershey Bar Syndrome.

In "The Mysterians," alien invaders attacked Earth with giant robots and disintegrator rays. Why? Their atomic experiments had polluted the Mysterians' home planet and made their own women sterile. They needed Earth women to breed with. Particularly, good-looking Earth women.

There is no film on record in which invaders from space come to conquer Earth because they want to breed with Earth men. You figure it out.

"Professor Dodd, why are the aliens attacking Earth?"

"They're a band of criminals from the planet Uranus. When they have our world in their electromagnetic grip they will migrate to it! I call their leader Zoron. He plans to rule the Earth!" — Strange Worlds comics No. 5, 1951.



Robert Ferrigno is a staff writer for the Register in Santa Ana, Calif.

FRIENDLY OBJECTS

Image Of UFOs Has Improved

RN

UFOs were not only on the movie screens of America during the 1950s, they zoomed off the garish covers of comic books, where wide-eyed children took the alien Z-rays right in the brain pan.

These comics were filled with

stories about alien invasions, the destruction of cities, aliens in human form, aliens in the guise of soft, cuddly animals and beautiful women, aliens offering phony "wonder drugs" in exchange for Earth's resources.

In one story from *Weird Science* No. 13 (1950), a character spots a saucer and reports it to the authorities. He's ridiculed. More reports come in from around the country. The newspapers and radio stations treat it as a joke. More reports, this time from a reputable airline pilot. This prompts a call for government action.

A high official interviews some of the eyewitnesses, grilling them about their personal habits — "I have a report here that says you ... er ... indulge in drink to excess. Do you deny that?" The government concludes that the reports are a fraud and closes the investigation. The last panel of the comic shows a vast saucer armada streaking towards Earth as people wail: "Flying saucers! Thousands of them! They'll be here soon, in a matter of hours ..."

By 1968, the country had changed, and so had our view of flying saucers. If during the '50s we felt that UFOs

wanted a piece of the American Dream — our uranium stockpiles, a home in the suburbs, Hollywood starlets — by the '60s we hoped the UFOs were coming to wake us up from the American Nightmare — hippies and yippies, race riots and police riots, Vietnam, political assassinations and the escalating cost of LSD.

In 1968, during the peak of our social turmoil, Eric von Daniken published his landmark book "Chariots of the Gods?" People were relieved. We were not alone, and somebody else was going to clean up our mess.

"Chariots" set out to prove not only that aliens had been visiting the Earth for centuries, but also that they had turned the planet into a vast urban renewal project. Spacemen, or their advanced technology, had built the Great Pyramid, Machu Picchu, Stonehenge, the Mayan calendar and the Jewish Ark of the Covenant. "The aliens *liked* us," said Von Daniken. "They wanted us to have tourist attractions for the next 5,000 years."

Even the supermarket tabloids switched from "RAPED BY A UFO!" headlines to "UFOs OFFER MIRACLE CANCER CURE AND BURN-OFF-FAT DIET PLANS!"

The ultimate sign of the acceptance of the UFOs as friends of mankind was the phenomenal success of "E.T.," a film by Stephen Spielberg.

E.T., the ugly little alien, has won the hearts and minds of everyone who's seen him guzzle a Coors. Today, millions of kids curl up with E.T. dolls at night and sleep under E.T. sheets, dreaming dreams of happy aliens and close encounters under the stars.

In this post-E.T. era, small children now lunch on the macaroni

manifestations of creatures not of this Earth, an unholy communion for a generation that doesn't know enough to be afraid of the unknown.

"Now that UFOs have landed in your supermarket, your kids will want to have them for lunch. UFOs are outerspace pasta shapes in rich tomato and cheese sauce that kids love." — Franco-American UFO macaroni advertisement.

That's right, folks, the UFOs are here, right in the canned food aisle of Safeway.

UFOs are Franco-American macaroni which come in five outerspace shapes — Alien, Galactic Interceptor, Man in the Moon, Star Cruiser and Star Colony — canned macaroni that tells an intergalactic saga, a pasta odyssey on every plate.

UFOs from Franco-American have been so popular that Chef Boy-ar-dee has come out with a similar product of his own: "Cosmic Kids." Cosmic Kids is macaroni in the shape of little three-legged aliens and friendly robots that wave "Howdy" as they slide down a Space Cadet's gullet. Yum!

So forget alphabet soup or animal crackers. Today's kid prepares for the future by eating lovable space-age critters. Remember, Mom, letting your kids put the gobble on E.T. could give them a head start in the high-technology world of tomorrow, and put them light years ahead of their Tang-swilling classmates!

That's why the National Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Ill., doesn't answer, and why the UFO information office in Washington, D.C., has been dismantled.

People used to flood these numbers with anxious telephone calls. Not any more. It's not that people no longer see bright lights in the sky. It's just that with all the Star Wars lunch boxes and E.T. coloring books, nobody's afraid of aliens anymore.

PD