

## MARFA LIGHTS CON'T

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Such considerations offer no difficulty for Gabriel Green, the president of the Amalgamated Flying Saucer Clubs of America, in Yucca Valley, Calif. He suggests that the lights are due to atmospheric ionization around spacecraft piloted by extraterrestrials. "They zigzag around to get our attention and expand our awareness," explains Mr. Green. The presence of mountains 30 miles away also is telling, he adds, because "it's fairly typical that they (the extraterrestrials) will set up their bases under mountains."

In a way, the lights of this small West Texas town are like the footlights of a stage that never quite became a scene of major drama. Marfa once was expected to explode

at the center of an oil boom, back 50 or 60 years ago, but the oil was never found; an outsize hotel built to accommodate the boom still dominates the downtown area.

During World War II Marfa swelled when an air base was built nearby; it shrank again when the base closed after the war.

In 1956 the town soared into prominence as the setting of the movie "Giant"; today, the only sign of the film industry is the former theater, which has played its last picture show and is now an electronics store.

There was anticipation of a uranium boom in the 1960s, when the geologists who saw the Marfa lights were in the area; it went the way of the oil boom.

So the elusive lights - Marfans often describe them as "friendly" lights - are the town's only reliable source of eminence. And old-timers aren't pleased when nonbelievers scoff at the mystery. "We all got kind of mad when a reporter from Houston said they were just mercury-vapor lights on ranches," says Julia Plumbley.

If anyone in these parts can qualify as an authority on Marfa's lights, she is probably the one. It was her father, Robert Ellison, who first noticed the strange flickering in 1883. "The light I've seen over the years isn't a ranch light," Mrs. Plumbley says firmly. "It's a soft, small kind of ethereal-looking light. You can't get close to it. And there's really nothing to say about it except that it's real and it's there."