

They won't choose
Devil's Tower or Disneyland. An earthbound E.T.
would prefer the city life

ALIEN LANDING

BY OWEN DAVIES

Well, it's over at last. We've opened the envelopes (ten boxes of them) and read the entries. Our judges have rendered their verdict. And the winner is...

On second thought, perhaps we should review the rules. Remember? You were to tell us in 50 words or fewer where in the United States aliens would land and why they would choose that site. Then you were asked to find the coordinates on the OMNI AMERICA map published last October, sketch the appropriate square, and send the package to us. While you were doing that, we recruited a distinguished panel of ufologists, science-fiction writers, and other seekers of alien intelligence to form a single expert answer to our question. The winner would be the person who made the same choice as our panelists and backed it with the best reasoning.

More than 4,000 readers accepted this challenge—one of the largest responses in *Omni* contest history. Men outnumbered women by about five to one (yet two of our three prizewinners are female). Eighteen teachers in both grammar and high school made the contest a



class project, sending in up to 50 entries per school from their students. We received envelopes from Yale, Harvard, MIT, IBM, Mutual of Omaha—and even one Indiana penitentiary.

Three answers were by far the most popular; nearly 25 percent of our contestants chose one of them. Aliens, they said, would land at Cape Canaveral, where they saw the space shuttle taking off; they would follow it home to Edwards Air Force Base; or they would land in the giant meteor crater outside Winslow, Arizona. Washington, DC, came in a distant fourth.

Several other answers appeared repeatedly. Many thought that hostile—or just cautious—aliens would land at the North American Air Defense Command, near Leadville, Colorado, to neutralize any possible threat to them. Others chose Rugby, North Dakota, the geo-

graphic center of the continent, or Devil's Tower, Wyoming, for a close encounter of the indisputable kind. Several nuclear facilities won votes: Alamogordo, New Mexico; Hanford, Washington; and Three Mile Island.

Atlanta was a surprise favorite. It is the home of the Atlanta Language Research Center, where scientists are already trying to establish communications with other species. It's also the site of the Centers for Disease Control, where aliens could either study our exotic microbes or be inoculated against them.

A few readers chose the White Mountains of New Hampshire, where Betty and Barney Hill claimed to have been abducted by aliens in the Fifties. And finally there was Escondido, California, home of the Nobel sperm bank, where beneficent aliens might make a deposit to improve the human breed.

Several imaginative answers won applause, if not the contest.

John Sprung of San Pedro, California, suggested that aliens will make their appearance in New Orleans to hear more of the Dixieland jazz now arriving by radio at their home planet. He calls this the Big Band theory.

PAINTINGS BY TIM WHITE

Nicholas Faust of June Lake, California, holds that the aliens will visit Oshkosh, Wisconsin, in late July or early August, entering their craft in the annual Experimental Aircraft Association fly-in.

The proverbial skepticism of Missourians won their state a vote; if they can be made to believe in aliens, the rest of the world should be easy. Extraterrestrials would land in Lamar, Elizabeth Bilobrowka of St. Johnsville, New York, added, because of their admiration for hometown hero Harry Truman.

George Lucas's Skywalker Ranch, north of San Francisco, would be a perfect landing site, Sondra Sykes of North Wales, Pennsylvania, suggests, because onlookers would shrug off the apparition as just another film shot.

What of our 12 panelists? Most of their entries seem more prosaic than the Nobel sperm bank and New Orleans nightspots, better reasoned than meteor craters and other geographic oddities. Here are our experts and their entries:

- Our first panelist refuses to travel by air, let alone spacecraft. Yet few are better qualified to speculate about where UFOs would land than Isaac Asimov, author of more than 300 books and countless articles on topics ranging from space to Shakespeare. An inveterate New Yorker, he selected map coordinates F-27 (New York City):

"The aliens are land-dwelling carnivores who are looking for other forms of high intelligence to learn from and to teach," Asimov explains. "They study the night sky for artificial illumination, betokening high technology, and land where it is brightest."

- Former *Omni* editorial director Ben Bova is now director of the National Space Institute, the Washington-based space-activist foundation. He has spent the last 25 years thinking about space exploration and—as a science-fiction writer—the possible nature of alien life. Like Asimov, he also chose F-27:

"I can think of three possible reasons for aliens to come here," he says. "They are seeking works of art they can send back to their home world; they are seeking new forms of entertainment; or they are seeking to convert all the inhabitants of the galaxy to their own religion. Therefore, I conclude that the aliens will land in Manhattan. Manhattan is the best place to find artworks. It is rich in entertainment possibilities. And certainly any evangelist would love to take control of the media here."

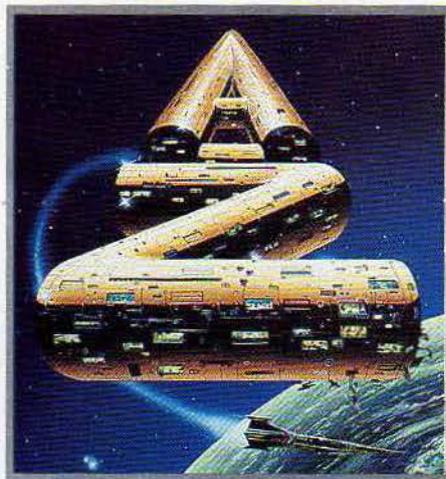
- Famed science-fiction writer Ray Bradbury foresees a landing in the American Southwest, somewhere between coordinates K-4 and H-11. He was not able to pin it down more closely than that. He writes:

"If there is any truth in our perceptions regarding the American Indian, then it might be wise for any UFO crew to consider landing in the middle of Arizona or New Mexico. Montezuma's amazing Arizona Castle might make a serene residence for the friendly invaders until they contacted your local philosophical chief or resident witch doctor. What would next occur might be the stuff for a pleasant—or perhaps jarring—novel, as the

outcasts of one world meet the outcasts of American time."

- Frank Drake, dean of the natural-science division at the University of California, Santa Cruz, is best known as the founder of SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. In 1960 his Project Ozma used the National Radio Astronomy Observatory at Green Bank, West Virginia, to eavesdrop on the stars Tau Ceti and Epsilon Eridani in hopes of detecting intelligent sounds. None were heard. Fifteen years later he turned the giant radio telescope at Arecibo, Puerto Rico, to the same task but achieved the same result. And in 1974 he reversed the process, using the Arecibo antenna to send his own message to the stars.

Drake focused on a site chosen by two other panelists—the experts' single most popular choice. We made the first two go back and try again, and even warned against this suggestion in our contest announcement, but we just couldn't argue with the man who brought hard science to the search for



aliens. He selected map coordinates J-2—Disneyland. His explanation:

"Where to land to learn most about our humanity in one spot? Disneyland is the choice because there one finds just about everything that is special about us. An image of our past, our future, our fantasies. Our belief that the world can be better and our belief that technology will make it so. Our love of fun—even hedonism—and our love of children. The rich, the poor, and the great diversity of racial and ethnic groups, something that may be a rare and remarkable phenomenon in civilizations."

- Philosophy professor Edward Regis strayed far outside the normal bounds of his field last year when he edited *Extraterrestrials—Science and Alien Intelligence*, a collection of scholarly articles. Now on a year's leave of absence from Howard University, he imagines aliens will land at coordinates H-4.

"Since aliens create their necessities from stars, they'll arrive to explore, not plunder. Wanting to escape detection while maintaining proximity to a city, they'll land in the desert near Las Vegas, the area of lowest electromagnetic emissions adjoining the spot of greatest brightness."

- Nuclear physicist Stanton Friedman has credentials that even ardent UFO skeptics can respect: degrees from the University of Chicago; 14 years of work on nuclear-power plants for both ground and space applications; jobs with TRW, Aerojet General, and other high-tech firms; and memberships in the American Physical Society, American Nuclear Society, and British Interplanetary Society. Yet he believes so strongly in UFOs that he spent 12 years lecturing about them. Today he divides his time between ufology and his practice as a consulting physicist. He cites coordinates J-10, in New Mexico, as most likely to attract aliens.

"Any local starfaring civilization would keep tabs on all nearby primitives and very close tabs on those about to venture forth into deep space. Automatic monitors would have detected atom-bomb and rocket tests, as well as radar signals, as long ago as World War II, triggering a complete technological and sociological evaluation of Earth," Friedman says. "The most logical place to find the explorers would be New Mexico, where the first atom-bomb tests occurred."

- Bruce Maccabee is also a physicist—he specializes in laser optics—and a firm believer in the existence of UFOs. "It wasn't any single thing that led me into the study of UFOs," he says. "It just became increasingly clear that many of the explanations given for UFO sightings didn't hold water. I have seen nothing since then to indicate that I was mistaken." He selected map coordinates J-9.

"First contact would occur in the Southwest, where alien craft are likely to concentrate their activities to observe our most advanced weapons technologies," he says.

Forced to pick a specific location, he chose the outskirts of Albuquerque, New Mexico, one of the largest cities in the region and near several weapons testing sites. El Paso, Texas, would be his second choice, he notes, because of its proximity to White Sands Proving Ground.

- In considering alien intelligence, it seemed reasonable to ask the thoughts of people working to create it here on Earth. As founder of the Artificial Intelligence Laboratory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Marvin Minsky is one of the most prominent leaders in his field. He suggests that aliens could land any day at the map coordinates F-27—but not in New York:

"The aliens' impression of intelligent life on Earth is based on what they have been able to learn from our powerful radio and television broadcasts. Naturally, they long ago decided that it would be too dangerous to approach such a fearsome civilization openly. Nevertheless, they launched a discreet expedition to New Brunswick, New Jersey, for the purpose of rescuing any survivors of the ill-fated Martian expedition to Earth, the one they heard described in the Orson Welles broadcast," Minsky explains. "They are considering turning back in fear of being vaporized by SDI," the Strategic Defense Initiative envisioned by President Reagan to strike down incoming missiles.

- Former NASA engineer James E. Oberg,

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CONCLUSIONS

In previous editions, we called on Science, Religion, Atheism and Philosophy to relate to questions on the adequacy, or inadequacy, of physical being and the true essential nature and rationale of all existence.

Man's fallacy lies in taking that which exists for granted, as the omnibus of all that is and ever will be — when that is surely not so. We explore and analyze things in and of the physical universe, we break it down, even split its atoms — *but we never put ourselves outside of the physical domain and appearance of things, sort of like looking in on the material world with eyes from outside.* This acceptance of the physical makes it supreme on us — its laws and causes and effects reign over our whole show, *we are in bondage.*

The real choice we have to make is between the physical — is it our ultimate goal? — and something beyond that, and if so, what?

This brings us to our various disciplines under consideration. Does religion answer us? It could, if it would be true to itself, carry through, and not do such foolish things as dogmatically look to precisely the wrong thing — physical phenomenon like flesh and blood — for salvation and deliverance.

Can science fulfill our ultimate fate? Not ever — because by nature it has the phenomenon of the material universe as its very foundation and domain. While it explains and has proven much to disperse superstition on many fronts, it cannot deal with the out question of *what's beyond the material universe and its laws?* It lacks ultimateness, deliverance.

The atheist hardly deserves mention at all — without wonder, how could he ever know any answers?

That leaves philosophy, free and unbiased, to sort things out for us. It can freely deliberate from within or without the physical realm. It could even crown religion as the ultimate ruler, if that is what it finds — but then only when reconciled and practiced anew, conform with ultimate truths.

So let's go to work, Philosophy, and find those incontrovertible facts and truths that will set the spirit free. Let the *Dark Ages in fundamental thought* be behind us. Let not ever again error and distortion and superstition bend our vision of the true, cognitive insight into the real nature of all things.

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a frequent contributor to *Omni*, has written four books about the future of human space development but none touching on space-faring extraterrestrials. In the debate over the reality of UFOs, he is a prominent debunker of sightings. Putting aside his natural skepticism, he chose coordinates M-25/N-26 as their most likely port of call.

"Extraterrestrial visitors will be primarily from a spacefaring civilization. The desire to identify a core of common experience with those humans chosen for first contact, and thus to enhance the chances of establishing successful communications, will lead to choosing a landing site where embryonic spacefaring is already being conducted by Earthlings," Oberg says. "The most obvious site is NASA's Kennedy Space Center in Florida, which also offers excellent facilities for general security and for parking."

• Sociologist Marcello Truzzi is the founder and editor of *The Zetetic Scholar*, a monthly journal of UFOs, parapsychology, and related matters. He claims to be essentially neutral about the existence of UFOs but distrusts professional debunkers, many of whom he feels are more authoritarian than objective. His suggested landing sight yielded no firm map coordinates:

"I assume that: 1) The aliens have monitored and understood our culture; 2) Their landing is to be viewed as friendly; 3) They want their contact to be clear and incontrovertible. A site meeting these conditions would be the ballpark on the opening day of the 1986 World Series," says Truzzi. "It will provide a large landing field before thousands of spectators; full international radio, television, and press coverage; and the likely presence of important political figures. The aliens might even demonstrate goodwill by joining in our national anthem."

Once these answers were in, a second round of polling reduced the experts' opinions to two possible answers. And there our panelists stood their ground. Two—Stanton Friedman and Bruce Maccabee—hold that aliens will head for the Southwest to survey our weapons, either to safeguard their expedition or to learn whether we will threaten them as we proceed into space. The rest are equally convinced that aliens will be too civilized, and perhaps too powerful, to fear human aggression. Thus the Southwest will have little to offer them.

The antiwar faction won out. And with that the answer was clear. Former *Omni* editor Bova had produced the majority's verdict: The aliens will land first in New York, at map coordinates F-27.

Fully 129 readers agreed. Many cited the United Nations as the aliens' destination. There the visitors might simply greet the peoples of the world and announce their friendship; they might ask us to put aside our nuclear weapons and save the world from possible annihilation; or they might make it an order, enforced by advanced ex-

traterrestrial technology. Some saw communications as the key: Radio and television networks would help the aliens get their message across. Others felt that the aliens would come simply to learn, and where better than in a city with so many universities, museums, and subcultures?

A week of sifting reduced the finalists to eight. Each offered something special—a unique insight, an unusually well-knit argument, or simply a good summary of the reasons aliens would land in New York City.

Bova, Friedman, and Oberg were charged with the responsibility of choosing a final winner. So, at last, here they are, the winners of *Omni's* Great UFO Contest:

First prize, a seven-day Caribbean cruise for two, goes to Betty L. Riddle of Kansas City, Kansas, for the following analysis:

"Throughout history," she writes, "exploration has been advanced not by soldiers or scholars but by merchants: Marco Polo and Columbus were seeking to expand European markets, not just nosing around. The first aliens to this planet will probably be doing the equivalent. Their technology will enable them to verify the New York area as a center of worldwide communication and trade for everything from high-tech items to toys. As a result, I see the New York City area as their likely landing site."

Second prize, \$350 in cash, goes to Russell Bullman of East Alton, Illinois, who managed to reconcile the disagreement between our weapons-fearing and pacifist panel members. He writes:

"I chose New York City as my landing site for three reasons: 1) It is the center of the world's most effective worldwide organization, the U.N., allowing contact with all world governments at once; 2) Many large news centers are based there, giving maximum coverage; 3) If the natives are hostile, they probably won't use nuclear weapons near a large population center."

Finally, our \$100 third prize goes to Patty Brown of Monroe, Louisiana, for this entry:

"New York City will be the landing site. Monitoring broadcasts while traveling to Earth, the aliens will find New York is a center of population, culture, communication, and the United Nations. Landing there would guarantee the aliens a forum to present their greetings and to communicate with other sentient species."

To those who did not win, we can only hope that you enjoyed working on your entries as much as we enjoyed reading them. We've always known that *Omni* readers own some of the world's sharpest minds. You've surely proved it. We'll be holding other contests, and we look forward to reading your entries.

And to all, please remember what we said in the contest announcement. We don't claim that aliens will ever land in New York, just that this was the best answer that good reasoning and a liberal dose of imagination could produce. In fact, we're not saying that extraterrestrials will ever visit Earth at all.

Just the same, are *Omni* editors spending more time peering out the office windows these days? Or is it just our imagination? ☐