

**DINOSAUR DRAMA: DID THE BIRDS COME FIRST?**

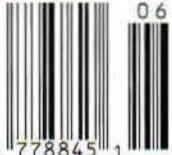
# ONLINE

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## UFO CONSPIRACY PART THREE



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# FIRST WORD

## EXTRATERRESTRIAL NIGHTMARES:

Aliens aren't the first creatures to capture our dark imagination

By David Brin

**David Brin offers a word of warning should E.T.'s visit our planet: "Wise uncles may be no better than nasty elves. We need friends, not sanctimony."**

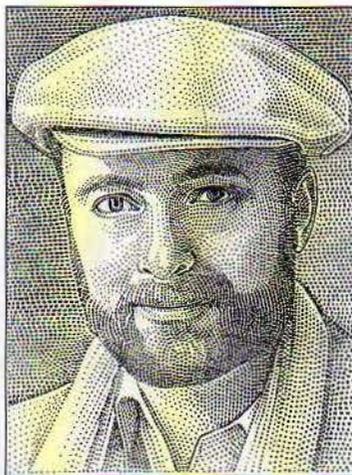
**A**s a frequent "futurist/space expert" on talk shows, I've faced my share of calls from believers in UFOs. Some are polite, sincere. Others get rude when I suggest that vague anecdotes aren't impressive evidence for such an important phenomenon. As a participant in SETI (the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) and author of science-fiction novels about "first contact," I don't like being called an Establishment shill, out to suppress unconventional thought.

The intense emotion behind UFOs intrigued me, but I never put it all together until my wife saw the cover of a famous book about alien abductions. "Huh!" she said. "When I picked this up, I thought it was about elves!"

Sure enough, there they were: huge enigmatic eyes, big smooth heads, long creepy fingers. I recalled fairy tales—not the sanitized, Disney versions—but old tales collected by the brothers Grimm or Native American legends of coyote or folklore of the Aranda, Yanomamo, Ibo. Although many fables are beautiful, spiritual, elevating, their non-human characters often behave in strikingly similar ways—capricious, mysterious, meddling.

It hit me. UFO aliens *are* elves! They fill the same niche as faery creatures, flitting at the fringes of the firelight. Only now, for better or worse, light from our civilization covers the planet, so faeryland has been pushed to outer space. Either something deep within us makes humans in all cultures hallucinate mysterious meddlers, or else they've been among us for ages—not visitors, but longtime neighbors. Familiar as the night.

Magical thinking. It occurred to me then that UFO cultism is a prime example of magical think-



ing, where what's objectively true is less vital than what ought to be. You cannot debunk such beliefs the way you would a flawed technical theory. No mountain of data can extinguish the enthusiast's glittering hope that "next time, E.T. will phone me!" Anyway, who wants to erase hope? Not readers of this magazine, who think themselves daring folk—the sort who should meet visitors, if they ever come. We and UFO fans share a sense of wonder at the vast cosmos. Only, we have no magical yearning for mysteries to remain mysterious. If aliens really are swooping down to twirl wheat, abduct folks, and stick needles in our brains, our natural question is *why*. Why high-IQ vandals instead of honest, open visitors?

UFO defenders plead that *they* are afraid of *us*, or we're not ready for contact. But such excuses sound whiny. Like the starship captain in the excellent but misunderstood movie *E.T.*, who abandons a crew mate when threatened with nothing more than flashlights, these aliens sound more like selfish cowards than the non-Earthly friends we dream of meeting.

Or take the excuse that "we have no right to judge. Their standards may be different." Perhaps. But this is *our* planet. If they're so smart, why not study how to be good guests? Don't kidnap people. Phone up JPL and we'll roll out the red carpet—landing sites, rent-a-cops, visas (of both kinds!). The Letterman show? You got it. But that's never been the way with elves. They don't like the light.

UFO myths include another type of alien—an "elder race" with answers to our woes. Today millions link the word *contact* with salvation. How ironic. After ages clawing our way upward by trial and error, through hard work by countless men and women, humanity seems poised at last to choose whether to take one final step—becoming civilized folk, planet managers, elder siblings to the species of our world. Now imagine a flying saucer lands and some austere, silver-clad envoy makes a speech provoking tizzies of euphoric new-millennia resolutions. After a hundred centuries of lonely struggle to grow up, just when we're on the verge of dramatic success or stunning failure, someone with a shiny suit and patronizing manner pops in, gives a lecture, then takes all the credit?

Thank heavens good science fiction offers countless more interesting speculations about alien life (if it exists) than condescending uncles or nasty little elves. But suppose those are our only choices?

Well, I don't mean to be a poor sport, and I hope we are gracious and mature hosts, however ill-mannered our guests appear to be.

But until then, I remain a big fan of the U.S. Air Force. Keep watching the skies, guys. Keep watching the skies. **DB**

# ARTS

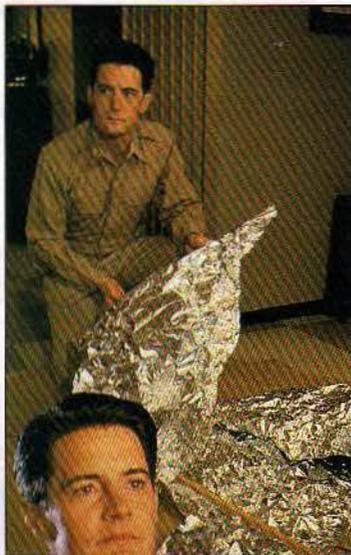
## ALIEN INSPIRATION: On the set of *Roswell*, the movie

By Bill Moseley

**S**omething crashed outside of Roswell, New Mexico, in July of 1947. The U.S. Army would have us believe it was nothing more than a weather balloon. But hundreds of eyewitnesses, military men just now daring to break their oath of silence, claim that what the Army discovered, recovered, and covered up was a ship from another world, complete with flight crew—one of whom was still alive.

This mother of all UFO stories

Strange metallic debris strewn over three quarters of a mile of a sheep ranch near the Roswell Army Air Field prompts Major Marcel, played by Kyle MacLachlan, to make public his suspicion of a UFO crash.



is the subject of the Showtime original movie *Roswell*, scheduled for a summer 1994 debut. Based on the nonfiction book *UFO Crash at Roswell* by Kevin Randle and Donald Schmitt, *Roswell* was written by Arthur Kopit, produced and directed by Jeremy Kagan, and stars Kyle MacLachlan (*Twin Peaks*), Kim Greist (*Brazil*), and Martin Sheen (*Apocalypse Now*).

The movie begins with a 1977 reunion of the 509th Bombardment Group from the Roswell Army Air Force Base, where through the use of flashbacks (or, as director Kagan calls it, a "Rashomonlike" approach), several of the men who participated in covering up the crash open up to Maj. Jessee Marcel (MacLachlan), the former base intelligence officer now in his seventies, and a startlingly different version of the Army's "weather balloon" story emerges.

As I spent three days poking around various sets in Los Angeles, it was emphasized to me that *Roswell* is not a science-fiction movie per se, but a film about relationships, secrets, and cover-ups: "The JFK of UFOs," as unit publicist Cid Swank put it so eloquently. However, if only to educate the nonbelievers (and titillate those in the know), Kagan has spiked the movie with references to such icons of conspiracy as the Majestic 12 (Truman's alleged clandestine UFO disinformation group) and Area 51 (the site where aliens supposedly have been overseeing the construction of spacecraft).

Executive Producer Paul Davids, who originally optioned the Roswell book and coopted fellow American Film Institute alumnus Kagan to the project, claimed to me to have seen a "domed disk" maneuvering over his house near Pasadena, Cali-

fornia, in the broad daylight of February 25, 1987. Interviewed on location at the Van Nuys, California, airport, in the shadow of a B-29 bomber, Davids went on to say that what attracted him to the Roswell mystery was the fact that many of the UFOs spotted during that summer of 1947, the year the term "flying saucer" was coined, matched his sighting, wobble for wobble.

Neither MacLachlan nor Kim Greist (who plays Marcel's long-suffering wife, Vy) had a close encounter by the start of production. Both actors were, in fact, much more concerned about playing characters who age 30 years in the course of the film—thanks to Manlio Rochetti's latex makeup magic.

Downstairs, in a simulation of the infamous Blue Room, a group of make-believe officers and surgeons was preparing to shoot the scenes in which the Roswell alien blesses them, dies, and is then promptly dissected—revealing a chestful of canned oysters. The silicone creature, courtesy of special-effects master Steve Johnson (who did Uma Thurman's thumbs in *Even Cowgirls Get the Blues*), did indeed look fetuslike, save for four fingers and toes instead of five (maybe that's where Steve got Uma's thumbs) and a lack of visible sex organs.

One theory about the Roswell aliens is that they were actually humans from the distant future and their spacecraft was in reality a time-travel machine. When I asked producer Ilene Kahn if it depressed her to think that the evolution of homo sapiens might include the loss of genitalia, she responded, "It would be sad to think that we're going from more contact to less contact. I would hope that we're not going to spawn by spores!" **DO**

# LAST WORD

UFOs IN NEW YORK:  
Roll out the red carpet and come on down!

By Peter Callahan

It was a big story when the UFO landed in New York; some even called it the biggest story of the twentieth century. Two aliens in a spaceship touched down in Times Square amidst the hustle and bustle of a Saturday night—and were promptly robbed and beaten by a group of thugs. "UFO a Flop on Broadway!" the *New York Post's* headline screamed. "Martians Mugged!" the *Daily News* blared.

The story may have died there, a one-day sensation in the tabloids, if a videotape of the incident hadn't emerged the next day. Shot from the sixth-floor window of an X-rated book depository, the tape set off a worldwide media frenzy. Even the *New York Times* discreetly reported the event on a back page of the Metro section, elevating the story above suspicion.

The aliens, identified as Quisp and Quake, received an outpouring of sympathy and donations from thousands of people shocked by the incident. At City Hall, the mayor offered a public apology and keys to the city. After the ceremony, the aliens told a packed press conference. "We mean no harm to you or your planet. We just wanted to see New York."

Quisp and Quake quickly became the toast of the town. The Plaza Hotel set them up in an elegant suite, while restaurants and nightclubs welcomed them with open arms. Their every appearance, from a taping of *Donahue* to the opening of a trendy disco, attracted hoards of adoring fans eager to glimpse the city's newest celebrities.

Quisp's rap version of the Byrds' *Mr. Spaceman* quickly topped the charts, and *Cosmopolitan* named Quake the Bachelor of the Month. It was a heady time for both the aliens and the



city. But then, unexpectedly, it was over. Quisp and Quake disappeared one night, apparently returning from whence they came, and everyone mourned the loss of the aliens.

Until the scandal broke.

It started small, as most scandals do, when a maid entered the aliens' suite at the Plaza and found it in shambles: champagne bottles strewn everywhere, cigarettes stubbed out on priceless antiques. It was time to call in the police.

"We started hearing things about these guys all over town," says Detective Clifton Leaf of the Police Department's Fraud Investigations Unit. "Unpaid restaurant bills, totaled rental cars—and a lot of broken hearts. Turns out these guys liked to play the field, and at least a dozen women have already filed paternity suits. The whole thing makes me sick."

The city rocked and reacted with each new revelation. A

major publishing house, after signing a million-dollar book advance with the aliens for an exclusive story, received a "manuscript" consisting entirely of newspaper clippings about the night of the incident in Times Square. A company the two founded, Spacial Relations, turned out to be nothing more than a glorified pyramid scheme. Investors lost millions.

The Martians even found time for small-time scams, according to Detective Leaf. "They were cleaning up on three-card monte games outside their hotel. People were looking at their funny heads instead of watching what they did with the cards." And they hit the transit system. "Because of their physiology," explains Leaf, "they were whizzes at sucking subway tokens out of turnstiles. Hell, they could suck a token out of your pocket and you wouldn't feel a thing."

The greatest shock came when experts determined that the video of the beating was a fake. According to Detective Leaf, Quisp and Quake staged the whole thing.

"We've arrested a group of unemployed actors who've admitted they were hired by these guys to play the muggers. In fact, if you enhance the tape, you can even see Quisp, when he's supposedly being beaten, laughing at one point. It just makes me sick," Leaf sighs.

In the wake of what the press now calls "Martiangate," many people are wondering how two little aliens could have conned so many sophisticated New Yorkers. "I guess in the end," says Leaf, "they were just a lot smarter than us. The way I see it, they must have been casing us for a long time, because they sure figured out how things work down here." ☐

Forget the nasty little green men; these aliens are really hip and they certainly know how to play the Big Apple for more than tea and sympathy.