

The man who killed the moon

When Neil Armstrong planted his foot in moon dust 25 years ago it was the fulfilment of a dream for the world's scientists. But it was the sad end of a 2,000 year old dream for the romantics. Their hopes were turned to moonshine.

Why? Because no one was there to meet Neil Armstrong, that's why.

No Selenites popping up from their underground dens. No glamorous Moon Maiden galloping across the arid surface on her exotic speed. No Greek ship, memento of the first moonshot of all, preserved for 2,000 years. And none of the teeming wildlife and mighty water monsters reported as fact in the New York Sun of 1835 - to make it, briefly, the best-selling newspaper in the world. Hundreds of thousands of people bought it for the reports, proving that people didn't want Armstrong's dead and desolate moon.

They wanted the moon as imagined over the centuries by writers from ancient Greece to Verne and H G Wells.

Neil Armstrong's first step on the moon was lauded as mankind's greatest. But as its 25th anniversary approaches, Dan O'Neill suggests the astronauts may have stamped out our dreams...

And what a blow for the cultists, the UFOlogists, as well. Bang went their theory that earth's satellite planet was really a giant spaceship, drawn into our solar system countless millions of years ago. And after Armstrong, who could take George King seriously?

King is the founder and

leader of the Aetherius Society, strangest of all "religions" based on UFOlogy. He has even been in a spaceship piloted by - would you believe? - Jesus. And that was on the moon only about 40 years ago, when George helped godlike Venusians to fight off an attack by evil outlaw aliens from a dark and distant galaxy.

He found all sorts of strange buildings on the moon, with UFO's buzzing over them. So either the intruders on our moon are masters of camouflage or Armstrong was telling porkies when he said he found nothing.

Man has been fascinated by the moon's serene beauty ever since he first crept out of a cave to gaze up in wonder at the heavens. He revered it as a god.

In True History, Lucian of Samosata wrote of a Greek ship carried up to the moon where the King of the Moon and the King of the Sun were at war over who would

colonise Jupiter. They settled, amicably, for Venus between them. In 1638 Bishop Francis Godwin sent his hero Domingo Gonsales up in a vessel towed by 25 swans.

He found giants among the moon-dwellers, who lived in peace because sinners were shipped to earth and deposited in North America.

Jules Verne and HG Wells used rocket propulsion to take their heroes up, and Wells gave us the Selenites, with homes below the surface. Edgar Rice Burroughs, perhaps tired of Tarzan, discovered a moon complete with beauteous maidens and fierce warriors. And Arthur C Clarke and Stanley Kubrick, of course, planted that colossal alien monolith on the moon in their classic, 2001 AD.

Less than 60 years ago Orson Welles caused massive panic in the United States with his broadcast of The War of the Worlds. People actually believed America was being invaded by Martians.

No doubt cultists like George King and readers of Ray Bradbury will persist in hoping that there really are cities with soaring crystal towers, and magical beings able to baffle us by offering the illusion of life on Mars - until the next Neil Armstrong hops down on to the surface of

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