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The Only in America Tour—Part 9 A Few Green Men

Do you believe in UFOs? I do. Clearly there are objects whizzing above our heads which cannot be identified. In my experience, most flying saucers turn out to be frisbees thrown by strangers... on the beach or in a park, across a field or parking lot. Such whirling disks routinely veer off course—yet with homing precision—to hit me squarely in the noggin. I am a magnet for crash-landing projectiles. I understood this instinctively from a young age. My middle school gym teacher called me “Cinderella”: I was always running away from the ball.

Other folks, however, report close encounters of a different kind. In Roswell, New Mexico, an incident happened in 1947 that changed the life of this humble town. In the 1860s, the spot was just a campsite for cowboys driving longhorns along the Goodnight-Loving Trail. The outlaw Billy the Kid frequently stopped here until he was killed by Pat Garrett, the resident sheriff. In later years, the gangster Pretty Boy Floyd added his memorable nickname to the visitors’ list.

The Roswell Army Field (later renamed Walker Air Force Base) was opened in 1941. It played a role in the unfolding drama of 1947. The



Welcome to Roswell, New Mexico. Note the unassuming cow being beamed up by the flying saucer.



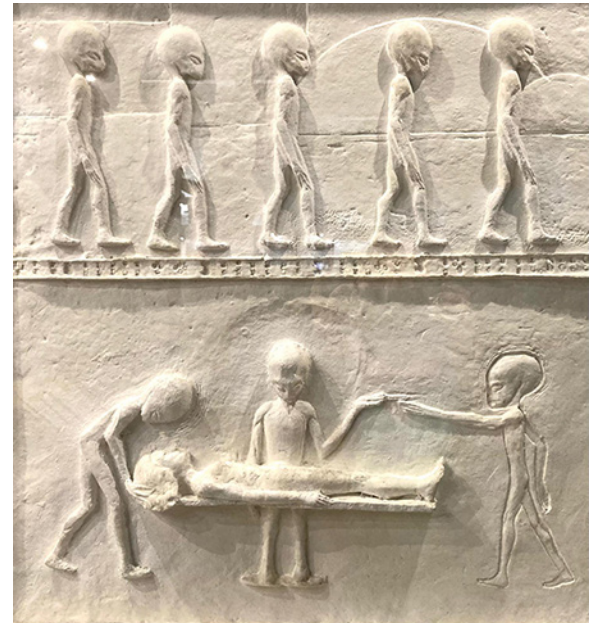


The UFO Museum displays a reconstruction of an alien reportedly seen lying on a gurney at the Roswell Air Field Hospital in 1947.

story goes that in early July a local rancher, Mac Brazel, found unusual debris scattered in one of his fields. He reported it to the local sheriff, George Wilcox, who took a look, and then reported the incident to the Roswell Army Field. Major Jessie Marcel, Sr. was instructed to investigate the strewn objects, which he did on July 7. He even took some items home to show his wife and young son.

Information spread quickly. On July 8, the *Roswell Daily Record* reported that a “flying saucer” had crashed near Roswell, New Mexico. As you can imagine, the *Associated Press* was thrilled to hover above that headline!

Alarmed, the military attempted damage control by announcing to the media that the wreckage was nothing more than a downed weather balloon. Major Marcel was allegedly forced to recant his original findings, to pose for a press photo with remnants of said weather balloon, to return all the evidence he had taken home, and ordered to keep his mouth shut. (Decades later, in 1978, retired officer Marcel revealed that the army’s weather balloon story was a cover-up. He believed the debris was of extraterrestrial origin.)



One of the more interesting placards inside the UFO Museum was this photograph of a sarcophagus lid. It was found in the tomb of the Mayan King Pakal, who lived from 603 to 683 A.D. The figures carved here in stone bear a striking resemblance to the creatures reputedly extracted from the 1947 flying saucer crash.

Meanwhile, the debris found at the ranch in 1947 was delivered to the Roswell Army Field. According to Miriam “Andrea” Bush, the personal secretary to the Air Field hospital administrator, she was brought into an examination room where she thought she saw children lying on the gurneys. But upon closer examination, Bush recognized that although the creatures were humanoid, they were not human. Then one of them moved; it was still alive! Bush too was ordered to keep her mouth shut, but according to her family she was haunted by what she witnessed for the rest of her life.

Who knows the truth? The disparity between the military’s official conclusion and the accounts later reported by eyewitnesses spawned an enormous conspiracy theory. Many believed that our government had covered up a UFO crash and concealed the bodies of aliens. Instead of fading into history, the “flying saucer” story gained traction and momentum over time. And so, in 1991, Roswell opened the International UFO Museum and Research Center. My traveling buddy Thea and I were curious about this unique institution and so added it to our “Only in America” Tour last summer.

The museum itself underwhelmed us, but a stroll along Main Street made the journey worthwhile. People have reported UFO sightings all over the world, but as far as I know, Roswell is the only place to so

wholeheartedly and unabashedly embrace its dubious history. There are little green men all over town—from the Mexican restaurant to the hair salon to the ATM machine. McDonald's outdid itself: the Roswell franchise is the only Mickey D's on earth shaped like a flying saucer! Even the hotel where we stayed got in on the UFO action. The sheer abundance of alien imagery was ridiculous and delightful. Only in America.

I did my part to help out the local tourism industry. I bought a green T-Shirt featuring a flying saucer and found a fabulous pair of bug-eyed alien-head earrings to match. The shopkeepers were totally on board with extraterrestrial spacecraft. I suppose economic expediency can make a believer of almost anyone.

So, what do *I* believe? Is there intelligent life on other planets? (Nowadays cynics could debate the extent of intelligent life even on *this* planet.)

I don't know. A woman whom I greatly respect, whom I have known my entire life, told me that she once saw a flying saucer hover over her yard in Southwest Virginia. This was not a woman given to hysterics or flights of fancy. She was one of the most grounded people I have ever known.

At the end of the day, I am comfortable *not* understanding life, the universe, and everything. Albert Einstein famously stated, "The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. Whoever does not know it and can no longer wonder, no longer marvel, is as good as dead, and his eyes are dimmed."

Theologians may question the veracity of UFO accounts and deliberate their significance for the Christian

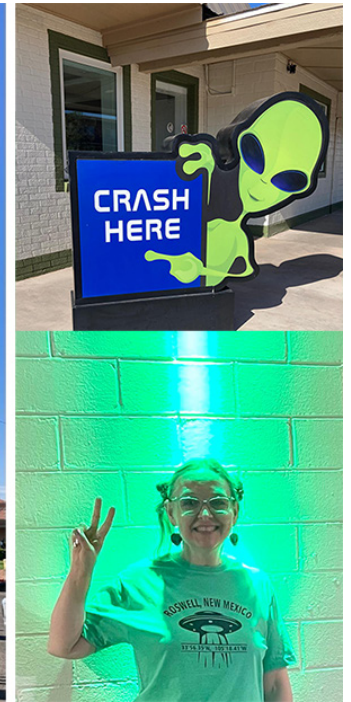




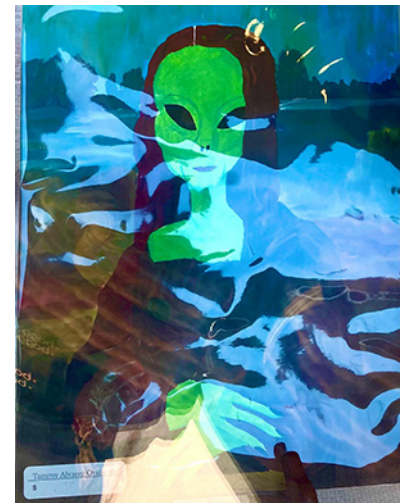
faith. But of one thing I am certain: if there are unknown life forms present in the universe, then they too were created by my sovereign and omnipotent God. Ah, but how little press coverage the good LORD gives them! Astronomers estimate that there could be as many as 200 billion trillion stars in the observable universe. But in the unfolding narrative of the Creation account, Genesis 1:16b simply states: "And he also made the stars." It's almost like an "aside." How few words for so many wondrous works!

From this, I gather that God's attention is not focused on vast far-flung galaxies; His gaze is fixed on us—the frail children of dust whom He formed in his own likeness—the wayward rebels for whom He went to extraordinary lengths to redeem.

We may laugh at medieval models of the cosmos in which the sun, moon, stars, and other planets revolve around the Earth. Spatially, the ancients got it wrong. But spiritually, they were spot on. God has given us human beings a place of honor—right beside Him—at the center of His universe. (If you are now shaking your head in disbelief and thinking I just got hit in the head by another flying object, please see Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 8:3-8, Psalm 16:5-11, Psalm 139:1-18, John 15:9-17, Ephesians 1:3-14, Colossians 1:11-23, I Peter 2:9, I John 3:1-3, and Rev. 1:5-6, 3:21.)



Perhaps all of those aliens in Roswell and beyond are green... green with envy... envious of a few good men (and women) highly favored by the Almighty. Maybe these extraterrestrial visitors are just dropping by planet Earth to see what all the fuss is about.



Have a delightful day! 

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Please encourage Mona at: encouragemona@gmail.com