

next year. I work every day on it. At my age, I don't have a great deal of energy. But I work four hours a day in four different shifts.

Q: You appear to be in good health.

A: Oh, I have an aching back from hunching over a computer. You know, I bought my first computer in 1979.

Q: Why haven't any of your books been made into movies?

A: Several have been optioned. People occasionally rewrite a script. I sold my first story to the movies fifty years ago. To American International. It was never produced. It would be nice to have a piece of that money. But I don't know what I'd spend it on now.

chapter 7

Making Movies by the Numbers

"Like Hollywood, Roswell is in the fantasy business."

— *Forbes*, 1996



ALMOST EVERY SCIENCE-FICTION MOVIE that dealt with aliens, from the 1950s until decades later, followed a set of regulations that should be called the Roswell Rules. These standards take their properties directly from what's been reported about New Mexico's prominent UFO incident. In movies that observe the Roswell Rules, the following situations always apply:

Radar screens and towers must be introduced early on.

All technicians must wear white lab coats or decontamination suits.

The military must be involved and must be trigger-happy.

There must be a moral.

Two films that use the Roswell Rules to greatest affect, that seem almost by the numbers guardians of those edicts, are *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invaders From Mars*. Both movies are hallmarks in terms of science-fiction celluloid. More important, each was

directly impacted by happenings that emanated from southeast New Mexico. Indeed, looking at those movies today one has to believe that the movies' makers knew a substantial amount about the classified events of July 1947 and utilized many of those reports to spin out their stories.

Before there were science-fiction movies of any kind, however, there was radio, and to fully understand the principles of the Roswell Rules, one must first consider a celebrated occurrence in that medium. Nearly ten years before there was a Roswell, New Mexico, incident, there was a Grover's Mill, New Jersey, incident. Grover's Mill, of course, was the site of a Martian landing in Orson Welles's famed modernized radio version of H. G. Wells's novel *The War of the Worlds*.

Broadcast nationwide on Halloween Eve, 1938, with only periodic disclaimers, the radio show caused an immediate uproar. Thousands of people, believing that Martian poison gas was spreading death and destruction over the East Coast, began to leave their houses to speed to what they thought might be safety. Others armed themselves to fight the invaders.

Welles initially denied that he wanted to cause trouble; his only purpose in doing the drama, he said, was to entertain. Still, he admitted he yearned to take a slap at radio—for having too much authority. UFO conspiracy followers believe that the United States government took it as a lesson to be used later. When something momentous happens, the lesson went, don't let it get any bigger than you have to, or civilians will act as they did in 1938: they will panic.

Indeed, that's what an Associated Press front-page story in the *Roswell Daily Record* of October 31, 1938 was headlined. "RADIO BRINGS PANIC TO MANY IN THE NATION."

No one living in Roswell in 1938 remembers great pandemonium there, though Frank Joyce, then a local youth of fifteen, recalls running outside his house that evening and carrying a rifle. Roswell's lone radio station had as usual signed off at 7:00 P.M.

that Sunday night, so Joyce and others, as they frequently did, tuned in a power station, such as one out of Fort Worth, Texas, or perhaps Shreveport, Louisiana. "A neighbor man saw me hurry out into the street that night with a shotgun," Joyce recalls laughing, "and he said, 'Whaddya doin'?' I said, 'Well, the Martians are comin'.'"

If Orson Welles offered nourishment to the idea that aliens could roam New Jersey, the far-and-wide UFO sightings of 1947 offered vigor to the idea that aliens could be found nationwide. In truth, aliens *everywhere* had been a concept for a while. During the war, allied fliers over Germany had reported strange glowing disks and lights and called them "foo fighters," from a maxim by a cartoon character named Smokey Stover, who was fond of saying, "Where there's foo, there's fire." (In an odd turn of events that may justify the logic of the Coincidental Corollary, the Foo Fighters, a rock 'n' roll band, provided some of the music for the 1998 movie *The X-Files*). Kenneth Arnold gave those disks the real boost, however. Arnold, from Boise, Idaho, sold fire extinguishers so well that he owned his own aircraft. On June 24, 1947, piloting his small plane in Washington state during a business trip, Arnold spotted near him in the air nine silver objects that zipped by like a flock of geese. The disks seemed to resemble boomerangs, or maybe saucers skipping over the water, Arnold told reporters, who quickly dubbed them "flying saucers." During the next few weeks, flying saucers were seen coming out of the clouds in nearly every state. Arnold went on to observe several more sightings before his death in 1984.

Through the years, UFO partisans have argued that Kenneth Arnold's disclosure and the Roswell incident were dismissed by the government in order to quell a *War of the Worlds* panic. Such arguments only served to plant more ideas in more people that saucers were real. After all, the arguers maintained, the Air Force had noted 122 flying-saucer sightings in 1947, the first year such records were kept. Twelve sightings that year went unidentified

and one UFO researcher says 850 more reports weren't even recorded during the twelve months.

With the foundation poured by Welles, the events of '47, and a renewed interest in science fiction, Hollywood grew interested. Movie studios quickly filled an entertainment void with this theme: creatures from outer space can drop in on us any time they wish. Americans were coaxed by the media into accepting that theme, or at least acknowledging that it might have validity. When radio personality Arthur Godfrey, who enjoyed a huge following, perhaps the largest fan base in the country, announced in 1950 that he had been buzzed by a flying saucer while piloting his plane, the gears started turning in earnest. Popular uproar grew with each year; and along with radioactivity and communism flying saucers touched a raw nerve with the public. *Destination Moon*, which opened in 1950, set off a torrent of science-fiction films in the fifties.

But it was *The Thing From Another World*, released in 1951, that laid the groundwork for the Roswell Rules. In that film, a pie-plate saucer crashes in the North Pole with an alien lifeform aboard. A snoopy journalist causes the government to fear that if word got out about the event, people would take fright. Later that year came *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. The movie takes what had possibly occurred in the New Mexico desert in 1947 and adds a strange twist to the position of UFOs in popular culture. Instead of being solely based on incidents, the movie may have sparked an incident. On July 19, 1952, a year after *The Day the Earth Stood Still* opened in theaters across the country, seven slow moving objects showed up on radar at National Airport and Andrews Air Force Base. A week later, another set of objects appeared again over Washington, D.C. One headline read:

FIERY OBJECTS OUTRUN JETS OVER CAPITAL
INVESTIGATION VEILED IN SECRECY
FOLLOWING VAIN CHASE

Filmed in black and white, and directed by Robert Wise, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* set a high standard for films that followed—particularly science-fiction films. Edmund North wrote the screenplay and based it on a Harry Bates short story, "Farewell to the Master," that originally appeared in *Astounding* magazine. The big difference between *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and other flying saucer movies is that Klaatu, the alien aboard the craft that touches down in Washington, D.C., comes seeking peace, not destruction. Klaatu, a humanoid, is draped in gray, the color witnesses have most frequently used to describe the Roswell aliens. The difference is that this alien speaks. Klaatu is disturbed, he says, by the troubled times on Earth, particularly the postwar paranoia over communism. Klaatu wants to get the world leaders together to discuss peace and goodwill before the planet blows itself to smithereens. If Klaatu senses something on the horizon, he is prescient: on November 1, 1952, the United States tested its first thermonuclear device, on Eniwetok, in the Pacific, generating a force 1,000 times greater than Hiroshima. The Russians completed their first nuclear test on August 12, 1953.

Even though they are backed by tanks and artillery, Army troopers suddenly panic, shoot and wound Klaatu. (Popular culture is derivative: Coast Guardsmen or Marines rarely confront aliens; it's almost always soldiers, as if taking a lead from Roswell, where the Army Air Force reportedly reached the crash site early, in order to clean things up and, according to UFO researchers, to erase the entire event from history, to "neutralize" it, as depicted in the movie *Men in Black*, 1997.)

Taken to Walter Reed Hospital—in the same manner that aliens in Roswell were supposedly transported to that city's Army Air Force hospital and then autopsied—Klaatu later escapes from a ward. Now disguised as an Earthling, he moves about Washington, where he makes friends with a woman and her young son, and tries to spread his olive-branch gospel. Even when Klaatu proves his point that people of the world must listen to him—he halts all

traffic, stops clothes dryers, and turns off outboard motors—few want to really believe him. He's jailed and eventually freed by his chilling Frankenstein-monster-like robot Gort. The two go back to their parked saucer in the Capitol mall, Klaatu delivers one final warning, guns his spaceship and is gone.

From the film's opening shot of spinning radar towers, a viewer knows *The Day the Earth Stood Still* is obeying the Roswell Rules. Several accounts have said that at least three radar stations in southern New Mexico had been tracking an unidentified flying object in the skies since July 1, 1947. The object had allegedly been first detected over White Sands Proving Grounds, where secret missile tests were conducted. During the evening of July 4, supposedly an unidentified radar target brightened and faded, then brightened again to a "sunburst" and disappeared entirely at 11:20 P.M.

The Roswell object was considered to move at "incredible speeds," says writer Kevin D. Randle. The spacecraft in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* travels at 4,000 miles per hour. Confronted with the saucer in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the Army tries and fails to blowtorch the shell of the vessel. In 1947, Major Jesse Marcel Sr., the Roswell base's intelligence officer, found he couldn't burn the recovered debris with a cigarette lighter. Klaatu worries about warfare testing done in America, and in 1947 New Mexico had the only atomic bomb. Finally, that Gort is a robot makes complete sense in light that several accounts from Roswell speculated that the aliens that came in 1947 were robotic in nature, automatons guided by an outside force.

All by himself, then, Gort launched a batch of robot movies, from *Robot Monster* (1953) to *The Robot vs. the Aztec Mummy* (1959). Most are awful and yet all share this pedigree: they have something to do with Roswell.

Contrary to widespread belief, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* was not the first UFO movie. *Flying Saucer*, a minor effort produced independently in 1949 and never released nationally, gets that honor. A government agent investigating strange sightings uncovers in

Flying Saucer a double horror: an alien craft and Russians up to no good. Four years after the Washington D.C. sightings made headlines, the nation's capital became the scene of another motion picture scare, *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, in which a bevy of disk-shaped saucers attack the District of Columbia.

The Day the Earth Stood Still's saucer first appears on screen as a prototypical Mexican sombrero, humming like a blender. Its size is what stuns the audience. Silver in color, the saucer measures 350 feet in diameter and stands 25 feet high. It was said to cost M-G-M \$100,000, an immense sum at the time.

Gort, Klaatu's traveling companion in the spaceship, was not filmdom's first walking bucket of bolts. One must go back to Golem, a female robot in Fritz Lang's 1926 creation, *Metropolis*. However, Gort, so clunking and yet so foreboding, was the most indestructible robot of his time. Curiously, in the original short story, the robot was the master and Klaatu acted as his servant. In the film, Gort, played by seven-foot-tall actor Lock Martin, never appears in a scene in which he doesn't cause immediate terror.

The Day the Earth Stood Still, like Orson Welles's radio broadcast of 1938, seems credible. Drew Pearson, the celebrated radio and TV broadcaster of the era, wears a snap-brim hat in the studio when he delivers the news flashes in his familiar clipped style. "The arrival of a spaceship is no cause for alarm . . . it landed at 3:47 P.M. . . . we don't know where it came from." News personalities H.V. Kaltenborn and Gabriel Heatter also are on hand to present bulletins about the landing. The appearance of those three adds a special touch of realism to the movie, just as if Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings and Dan Rather would if they had turned up holding microphones in *Independence Day*.

As *The War of the Worlds* radio broadcast did, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* accentuates a fear of the unknown. The United States at the time was experiencing A-bomb anxiety. To substantiate that uneasiness, the film aligned those feelings with an alien invasion. Indeed, Klaatu announces: "We know your planet has discovered

a rudimentary form of atomic energy and that you're experimenting with rockets . . . soon, one of your nations will apply atomic energy to spaceships and that will create a threat to the peace and security of other planets. That, of course, we cannot tolerate."

Christian symbolism is woven through *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, and the movie was readily accepted in Roswell, where the sound of churchbells has always filled the air on Sunday morning. Klaatu, as portrayed by the serene British actor Michael Rennie, takes the disguise of Major "Carpenter" to offer mankind salvation from holocaust. In the movie, Carpenter is betrayed and then imprisoned by soldiers. When Gort melts a wall of the jail to free his master, it's as if someone is rolling away a stone from Jesus's tomb. When Klaatu finally departs Earth, it's his Ascension that appears to be the last chance for man.

So a conversion begins. We're helped in our new beliefs by having empathy for the people Klaatu touches—Helen (Patrica Neal) and her young son Bobby (Billy Gray). Both of those characters think of the space alien as a person and not a thing, a rare event in science-fiction films—then or now. Even if we're agnostic, we have reasons to look up to Klaatu. In the way he changes his clothes—from alien to Carpenter to alien again—he's like another hero of popular culture, Superman.

Even the humming noise of the saucer plays a role in our conversion, and it's no wonder. Bernard Hermann, the composer who created the music for Orson Welles's Mercury Theater version of *The War of the Worlds*, created the eerie electronic score for *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

As serious as the message is in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, the movie offers sly humor, which also helps to explain the film's success. A woman who doesn't know that Rennie/Carpenter is the alien, says to him, as one might say to a stranger:

"You're a long way from home, aren't you?"

When someone mentions spacemen invading, a skeptic rolls his eyes and says, as one would say of a deranged person:

"They wouldn't come in spaceships; they'd come in airplanes."

When Klaatu is asked how much he knows of astrophysics, he answers as one might when confronted with a silly question:

"Well enough to get me from one planet to another."

Despite its adherence to the Roswell Rules, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* has moments of incredulity. As the saucer and robot sit in wait on the mall in Washington, D.C., only two soldiers are assigned to stand guard. (At least two dozen armed troopers were said to flank the Roswell ship.) Yet it's the message of the movie—that global peace is still an elusive goal—that holds up almost fifty years later. During a visit to Arlington National Cemetery, when Klaatu tells young Bobby that his planet has no wars, we know that something is wrong in our world. And of course there is the message bound in Klaatu's final reminder:

"I came here to warn you that by threatening danger, your planet faces grave danger."

The Day the Earth Stood Still not only served as a standard-bearer for other science-fiction movies of the decade, but it gave Klaatu an enduring fame. For generations of moviegoers, Patricia Neal's peculiar line to Gort, asking for help to rescue his master, became a celebrated chant: "Klaatu borada nikto." In the 1970s, a rock music group named itself Klaatu. Ringo Starr further enshrined Klaatu by putting the alien, Gort, and himself on the rim of a flying saucer and making that the cover of his album "Goodnight Vienna."

Even renowned anthropologist Margaret Mead must have been a fan of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. In a 1974 article in *Redbook* magazine, Mead writes of UFOs: "the most likely explanation, it seems to me, is that they (aliens) are simply watching what we are up to—that a responsible society outside our solar system is keeping an eye on us to see that we don't set in motion a chain reaction that might have repercussions far outside our solar system."

The movie's status in the pantheon of popular culture was solidified when the first major catalog of feature film cassettes for home videotape players was released in 1978. *The Day the Earth*

Stood Still was the single science-fiction offering from the 1950s, a decade that produced thousands of reels of sci-fi footage.

Thirty years after *The Day the Earth Stood Still* appeared, the idea that a space alien could come to Earth as a gentle soul still mesmerized Hollywood. *Starman*, released in 1984, starred Jeff Bridges as an alien who crashlands his spaceship in rural Wisconsin. (The Coincidental Corollary can be seen again: during the early 1950s the Aerial Phenomena Research Organization, which tracked all information on flying saucers, was located in rural Wisconsin. Later, it moved to New Mexico, to Holloman Air Force Base at Alamogordo.) Bridges takes the form of a human and becomes a figure of great benevolence: he restores life to a dead deer, and he impregnates a woman who never thought she could conceive.

"What's it like up there?" Starman is asked.

Klaatu-like, Bridges answers, "No war . . . no hunger . . . the strong do not victimize the helpless . . . we are very civilized."

The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976) features a similarly calm visitor from outer space. Fragile, pale Thomas Newton, a defier of gravity played by rocker David Bowie, has come to Earth to seek water. Newton's planet is suffering from a severe drought, and he is desperate for a means of bringing liquid to his wife and two children, who are dying of dehydration. Filmed partly in Artesia, thirty miles south of Roswell, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* offers some of the same shrewd double-entendres as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

Girl: "What do you do for a living?"

Bowie: "Just visiting. . . ."

Girl: "Oh, a traveler."

Later, the same girl, a motel maid in Artesia, a city that might as well be Roswell, says words that any UFO investigator can appreciate: "What do you want to go back to a desert for? We got deserts here."

If *The Man Who Fell to Earth* reminds us of anything, it's that fantasy can sometimes be confused with reality. Apollo 13 astro-

naut James Lovell, who almost fell out of the stratosphere himself in 1970, plays a cameo role in the movie.

The year 1953 was a vintage one for science-fiction films and releases ranged from *Them!* to *Donovan's Brain* to *The Beast From 20,000 Fathoms*. To some degree, all paid attention to the Roswell Rules, particularly lab personnel in white smocks who stare wide-eyed at radar screens, and Army troops who shoot first and ask questions later. *The War of the Worlds*, which also rolled across the screen that year, took things a step further. The film actually mentions, if obliquely, the 1947 incident in New Mexico. When an airplane flown by Dr. Clayton Forrester (Gene Barry), an astrophysicist, is shot down by Martians, it crashes in a barren patch of what appears to be the Southwest, clearly a clever reversal of the Desert Dictum. Forrester's female companion (Ann Robinson) asks Forrester where they are.

"Southwest of Corona," says Forrester, mentioning the nearest New Mexico village to the debris field stumbled upon by Mack Brazel in 1947. "There must have been another cylinder down here. They've been through this whole area and cleaned everybody out."

Forrester's character is based loosely on Dr. Lincoln LaPaz, a dashing, square-jawed mathematician who founded the University of New Mexico Institute of Meteoritics in 1944 and remained its director until 1966. LaPaz had studied incendiary bombs carried by Japanese paper balloons during World War II, and he had examined the Socorro incident in 1964, which he blamed on a vertical short takeoff and landing aircraft, used by the military. In 1947, the government had summoned LaPaz, who held a top-secret clearance, to Roswell to inspect the debris field. LaPaz's findings never were made public, but a few years later he told a reporter, "There is no need to believe we are being invaded from outer space. Anyone living outside this troubled globe would be displaying absolute nonsense to come here."

In terms of impacting the popular culture of UFOs, no 1953 science-fiction movie can come close to *Invaders From Mars*. Upon

its release, *Invaders From Mars* did not enjoy the same applause heaped on *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Indeed, some critics who loved *The Day* dismissed *Invaders* as bunkum. "Funnybook . . . full of impossible action and childish imaginings," said *The New York Times*. Despite such ridicule, *Invaders From Mars* today is considered an astonishing accomplishment. Directed by the esteemed William Cameron Menzies who, in 1934, had designed and put together the movie *Things to Come* from the H.G. Wells's novel, *Invaders From Mars* was a success at the box office. More important to its makers, *Invaders* beat out by six months the release of *The War of the Worlds*.

Invaders, just as much as *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, built upon the growing, xenophobic, Roswell-reinforced angst of the times. And, maybe more than *The Day*, *Invaders* has since become a cult classic. Though it appears to have been turned out swiftly and cheaply, *Invaders* stands out, particularly for its use of color and lighting.

As with many science-fiction films of the fifties, *Invaders From Mars* draws from the pulp fiction conventions that had dominated science fiction since the 1920s. Invasions from space, stalwart heroes, beautiful heroines, heat rays, and bug-eyed aliens were all part of science fiction's stock-in-trade during the genre's adolescence.

It's true that *Invaders* kept things simple, that it was and is pure escapism—on one level. Earthmen versus aliens, good versus evil, us versus them. But there are many levels to this picture. David MacLean, (Jimmy Hunt), is the hero of *Invaders*. Like *The Day the Earth Stood Still*'s Bobby Benson, an innocent, wonder-struck boy is this movie's chief protagonist. David rescues Army troops in an underground grotto with a motion ray gun only he can operate. Only David can spot the differences between normal people and those enslaved by the Martians. Only David can alert others that something is very wrong.

The figure of the child is significant in science fiction of the

fifties, and director Steven Spielberg drew on that knowledge years later when he created his two masterpieces, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T.*, *The Extraterrestrial* (1982). In *Close Encounters*, four-year-old Barry Guiler (Cary Guffey) is kidnapped by a UFO. In *E.T.*, ten-year-old Elliott (Henry Thomas) is the befriender of a Reece's Pieces-loving alien. While each child is intrepid, neither is like the boy-heroes of *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invaders From Mars*, which turn their children into John Waynes. The young boys of these two movies represent a version of ourselves: Bobby and David are what we hoped we could be. They can believe anything and do anything and look upon tomorrow as a time when anything can happen. It's a belief that Jesse Marcel Jr. epitomized in the Roswell incident. When his father one night brought home to show young Jesse pieces of what the senior Marcel believed were outer space debris, little Jesse, wearing pajamas, looked on with eyes the size of oysters.

Both *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invaders From Mars* involve child-parent relationships, as did the Roswell incident. On July 5, 1947, when ranch foreman Mack Brazel went out near Corona, New Mexico, to inspect the pastures of what later became known as the debris field, a large stretch of sinkholes, depressions, and sagebrush, he brought with him William "Dee" Proctor, a neighbor boy, about the same age as Bobby Benson and David MacLean. Brazel and young Proctor found scattered all across the slopes of the Foster ranchland northwest of Roswell, metal and plastic-like beams, lightweight sticks, pieces of sturdy string and tinfoil. There's so much junk strewn about the field that sheep refuse to cross the plain and have to be led to a waterhole a mile away.

Believing at first their discovery might be a giant kite, Brazel and Dee Proctor actually spend several minutes attempting to fly the debris. Curiously, Elliott, whose father in *E.T.* is divorced from his mother, goes alone to a clearing in a forest and single-handedly helps his alien friend rig up a transmitter that uses debris, including a circular saw, umbrella, and tinfoil.

Debris and the work it entails to remove it, have intrigued movie-makers since the Roswell incident. For reasons of its own, Hollywood found a strong bond between space travel and janitors. Roswell likely influenced this thinking, for one luminary there, according to some UFO chronologists, was Warrant Officer Robert Thomas, in charge of the clean-up at the alleged site the day after. Indeed, Thomas and his team reportedly swept spotless the ground where the spacecraft supposedly fell. They did such a good job that they erased for everyone any physical sign that the incident happened. And yet at the same time that fine job by these picker-uppers caused countless people to believe it *did* happen.

This trend, call it the Cosmos Custodian Doctrine, began in theaters in 1953 with *Abbott and Costello Go to Mars*. The janitorial pair is tidying up around a rocket ship one day when suddenly they're lifting off to the Red Planet. (To ask how that ever happened is to ask why aliens don't wear tuxedo pants or dinner jackets.) Anyway, Abbott and Costello's rocket eventually lands not on Mars, but on Venus, which is populated by bathing beauties. (Again, don't ask.) The Cosmos Custodian Doctrine reappears in *The Three Stooges in Orbit* (1962), in which the broom-pushing Stooges, also due to reasons too complicated to explain, find themselves headed for Mars. Their craft is a propeller-driven tugboat but one should fear not; the Stooges are space experts, as they so adeptly proved in *Have Rocket Will Travel* (1959). Don Knotts spends his days moving a mop at NASA headquarters in Houston until someone in *The Reluctant Astronaut* (1967) decides that Knotts should be steering a space capsule, beating the Russians to Mars. The truth is up there: on the big screen, Knotts bore great facial resemblance to astronaut Alan Shepard.

O.J. Simpson had no floors to polish in *Capricorn One* (1978), but as an astronaut on a phony voyage to Mars Simpson had to huff and puff to make us believe he really was one of NASA's finest. (His first line in the movie: "I think I'm gonna throw up.") Of interest to Roswell anthropologists: the fraudulent journey in *Capri-*

corn One takes place in a hangar on an Army Air Base set in Texas—"abandoned," indicates a sign in the film, "in 1947."

A warm-hearted scientist rather than a dustpan-holding laborer takes an important role in both *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invaders From Mars*. In *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, it's Albert Einstein-like Professor Barnhart. In *Invaders From Mars*, it's Dr. Stuart Kelston, a Mr. Wizard sort of astronomer: "Here, David, let me show you how to use this retractable lens. . . ."

The message is clear: events such as Roswell drew scientists, but most of those men were cold and unfriendly and likely worked for the government. Surely if those scientists had only been like Professor Barnhart and Dr. Kelston, well, we would be so much better off.

Finally, *The Day* and *Invaders* offer as a central character an adult woman who is sympathetic to the young boy in the story and so attractive to the aliens that they wind up carrying her in their arms. The counterpart in the Roswell incident would be Loretta Proctor, young Dee's mother, said to be enchantingly downhome.

The flying saucer of *Invaders From Mars* is hardly as fearsome looking as the one in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Nevertheless, it chills us. We see it early, as we do the one in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, just as young David spots it from his bedroom window. The craft plunks down in Coral Bluffs, the sandhills behind David's house, and the geographic reference is obvious: Coral Bluffs is the White Sands Proving Grounds, which in 1947 was said to be a likely magnet for curious alien visitors. Adjoining Coral Bluffs stands the Armstead plant, where David's father works and which is rumored to be making all sorts of top secret rockets, just like postwar White Sands, or the Roswell Army Air Field which in 1947 harbored an atomic bomb.

Invaders From Mars originally was meant to be the first science-fiction 3-D movie, but that idea eventually was scrapped. Even in two dimensions it's a muddled story, however. A young boy who witnesses a Martian landing soon recognizes the way the invaders

take over the brains of Earth dwellers by implanting crystals in the backs of necks of anyone who falls into the sand pit behind the MacLean house. Accompanied by "The Cassions Go Rolling Along," the Army arrives as usual, with all kinds of heavy firepower. "If it's a fight they want, they're gonna get it," says Colonel Fielding, played by Morris Ankrum, a journeyman actor who defined the role of the impetuous and stubborn military officer. His equal in Roswell? Colonel William H. "Butch" Blanchard, commander of the 509th Heavy Bomber Wing at Roswell Army Air Field in 1947. Blanchard had ordered the famous "Flying Disk Recovered" press release and the following day had changed the story to read a weather balloon, on orders from his superior officer in Texas. On May 31, 1966, the hard-charging Blanchard suffered a heart attack at a desk in the Pentagon. A decorated B-29 pilot in the war, Blanchard was the second-ranking officer in the Air Force when he died, at age fifty. Ankrum built a career out of parts in science-fiction movies of the fifties. In addition to *Invaders From Mars*, Ankrum's credits include: *Rocketship to the Moon* (1950); *Flight to Mars* (1951); *Red Planet Mars* (1952); *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers* (1956); *From the Earth to the Moon* (1958).

The arrival of Colonel Fielding and his troops brings about an underground battle, with young David leading the way against aliens, all large and as ugly as mud fences. One of the aliens is played by the same Lock Martin who, coincidentally, wore Gort's robot armament in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*.

Invaders From Mars engenders the same kind of flying-saucer hysteria as seen in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. The Martians who want to get their green mitts on that rocket ship at the Armstead plant and use it to get back to their planet, turn the Earthlings into walking zombies to help them. David's father George MacLean (Leif Erickson) suffers from so much mind-control—like others afflicted, a red hole has been drilled in the base of his brain by the *Invaders*—that he smacks his son. You know the abuse is far out

of character, but it's so frightening that you don't know what can be done about it.

Like *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *Invaders* possesses strong religious elements. In a series of placidly beautiful scenes, young David watches as victim after victim falls into the Martian sand-trap, as if being won over to a new and tranquil faith. Meanwhile, a Hallelujah chorus provides background music. It took thirty years of horrifying space monsters before this charitable, quasi-spiritual attitude could be seen again, specifically in the goodness of the aliens found in *Close Encounters* and *E.T.*

When young David finally goes to the police station to ask for help for his parents and others similarly brainwashed, the resulting scene is downright scary. The station is bare and white and David's smallness in that stark emptiness is intensified. (It's surely a similar feeling that small-in-stature Mack Brazel must have experienced when the Roswell base security squad detained him for nearly a week in 1947.) In fact, the camera takes the same angle to shoot David talking to an adult as it did when *The Day's* Bobby Benson had a heart-to-heart talk with Klaatu.

A hefty dose of sexuality permeates *Invaders From Mars*. David is helped by a pretty young nurse (actress Helena Carter, in her final movie) and as she takes the part of his mother, she nearly receives one of those awful neck implants. Though no record exists of anyone being implanted at Roswell, a pretty young nurse does figure in accounts of the incident. Mortuary worker Glenn Dennis said the woman, who worked at the Roswell Army Air Field hospital, relayed to him in July 1947 the terrifying information that an autopsy on space creatures had just been performed at the base.

While Klaatu bears goodwill, the hideous mutants in *Invaders From Mars* have no such generosity on their minds. Covered by a green woolly skin, their heads a lollipop of knobs, the invaders hold in their hands what appear to be jumbo-sized toilet plungers. "Big apes," the soldiers call the creatures. They lumber around

below ground, controlled by their master, a ghastly looking head that rests inside a fishbowl and that silently gives commands by darting its eyes back and forth.

There is silliness in *Invaders*, as there was in *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Dr. Wilson, the prominent physicist at the Armstead rocket plant, is shown handling test tubes, as a chemist might. The Army has stopped the mutants' brain-control device with this easily understandable solution: "We've rigged the original crystal to a variable oscillator." When the mutants' saucer explodes at the end of the movie in a stirring detonation, only one small tree falls over.

In defense of some of the film's awkwardness, Menzies's original storyboards became lost during shooting and much improvising had to be done, particularly toward the end. That explains why the Martians are seen loping aimlessly about the grotto, back and forth. It was simply an attempt to add minutes to the movie.

Invaders brings to the screen no great revelations about science. In fact, it took a slap at science fiction—when David's mother berates him for reading trashy sci-fi magazines. Instead, *Invaders* offers powerful visual images and in doing so reflects the secret hopes and desires in all of us. If the movie speaks any language, it's the language of dreams and nightmares.

Invaders shows that Good Guys can win. "We'll blow them all the way back to Mars," promises Colonel Fielding. Young David helps to rescue alluring Helena Carter before a crystal is rammed into the base of her brain. Moreover, the grotto is an interesting place. Menzies's design for the odd-shaped bunching on the tunnel walls was implemented by using ordinary rubber prophylactics.

Not long after the Martian ship detonates, David wakes up in his bedroom. Was he having a dream? Hard to say. In fact, the movie developed two endings. The original conclusion was reshot for European audiences. David looks out the window and once again sees another spaceship coming to land. The story starts all

over again, sort of a *Groundhog Day* (1993) with the willies. In another ending, David wakes up and tells his dad he was having a bad dream, about aliens. "They were green," he says, "and had a ray gun."

Go to sleep, David's father urges, though that's not so easy to do after watching this film.

Invaders From Mars bred a legion of imitators, most of them dreadful. A few of the copycats: *Flight to Mars* (1952), *They Came From Beyond Space* (1967), and *Don't Play With Martians* (1967). In 1959, a New Jersey man named Howard Menger, who had claimed to be a contactee and had made frequent appearances on Long John Nebel's celebrated WOR radio show in New York City, published *From Outer Space to You*. In the book, Menger talked about his various intergalactic trips with a well-endowed blonde alien who "looked twenty-five but was more than 500 years old." She had come to Earth, said Menger, "to help." Far more startling to anyone familiar with the plot of *Invaders From Mars* was that Menger one day had taken his twelve-year-old son, Robert, to a pasture near their house to see a UFO and its crew. Robert Menger was dying of brain cancer, and he couldn't see the spacemen, he told his father. Angered that his son didn't believe him, Howard Menger smacked the boy.

Just as the Roswell incident was gaining momentum, in 1986 a remake of *Invaders From Mars* came out, directed by Tobe Hooper, the man behind the *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* movies. At 102 minutes, the remake was almost thirty minutes longer than the woe-fully short original. But it was only one fifth as good.

The new *Invaders From Mars* appears less like an updated version than a ripoff of other movies. A boy still watches a UFO land in the hill beyond his house. Earthlings still get neck implants from the visitors. The military (Marines, this time) still come to the rescue. In the newer model, the Martians look like rabid hogs and they travel in a spaceship that resembles a boulder with windows.

In an attempt to raise the 1953 version, the 1986 version falls

all over itself by stealing parts from other movies. David's father has clandestine meetings with strangers (*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, 1956, '78); David's teacher swallows live rodents (the 1985 television mini-series *V*); and David's biology class studies frog dissection (*E.T.*, *The Extraterrestrial*).

None of the tension in the '53 version appears in the '86 one. Indeed, after getting zapped by the Martians, David's father, played by Timothy Bottoms, is far too sweet to put fear into anyone. He doesn't raise his hand at his son and barely raises his voice. The sexual tension seems watered down when the viewer realizes that the nurse (Karen Black) in this movie is in real life the mother of David (Hunter Carson).

There's much screaming and yelling, David ray-guns a tunnel to escape from of the cave, and the best line comes from Colonel Fielding's character who has been promoted and given a new last name. "The Marines have no qualms," barks the general as he leads his troops up the sandy hill, "about killing Martians!"

The thievery of *Invaders From Mars* continues. In *One West Waikiki*, a cheesy 1994 TV series, Cheryl Ladd plays a disturbed doctor who has implants in the back of her neck. Same with agent Dana Scully on a 1995 episode of *The X-Files*. *Target Earth*, a 1998 made-for-TV movie, features Earthlings that have been abducted by aliens over the years and surgically fixed with a neck chip that will be activated on the alien version of D-Day.

The Roswell Rules—lab techs, G.I.'s with mortar launchers, and a strong moral—may be *Invaders From Mars*' greatest legacy years later. Those rules can be evidenced as recently as the mid-1990s, in *Species*, which has the requisite radar tower, sterile suits, aggressive soldiers and a Don't-Mess-With-Mother-Nature message. But more often than not it was during the fifties that the Roswell Rules served as guidelines for movie after movie. Take *It Conquered the World* (1956), for example, which surely ranks as one of the worst movies ever put on video. Made by Roger Corman, it starred Peter Graves, a veteran of interplanetary creature films (*Killers From*

Space, *Red Planet Mars*). The first two words spoken in *It Conquered the World* are "Unidentified object." The line is delivered by a woman who is studying a radar screen and wearing a lab coat. The alien in *It Conquered the World* resembles an enormous kumquat and emits little winged offspring that appear to be bats. The visitors are from Venus and they do not come in peace.

It Conquered the World, which went straight to drive-in theaters, copies both *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and *Invaders From Mars*, and perhaps that is the finest compliment anyone can give the subterranean-budgeted, black-and-white quickie. When the Venusian veggie gets upset on Earth all electricity goes on the blink, all clocks stop. When the alien in *It Conquered the World* wants to control the minds of Earthlings, he has his small, bat-like birds bite humans—in the back of the neck. At the end of *It Conquered the World*, a deeply worried Peter Graves moralizes, "There is hope, but it has to come from inside, from man himself."

The moral of Roswell, of course, is this: when the government says something didn't happen, man has hope. Hope that something *did* happen, and that it was covered up. Hope that that cover-up will never actually be exposed because, after all, people, like moviegoers, need something to fantacize about, and to keep believing in, often through the price of a single admission ticket.