

The UFO Files & The World's Strangest UFO Stories

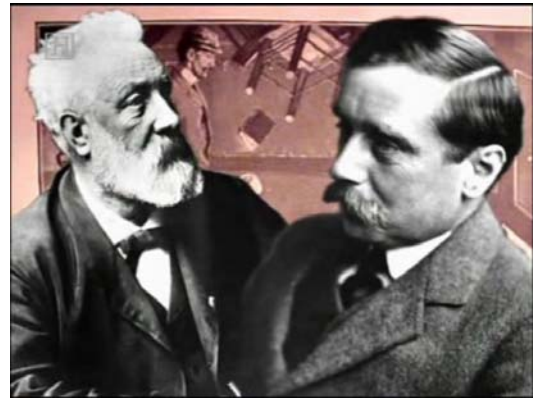
On Sunday, 15th January 2006, two of the top documentary channels on television each launched a brand new series devoted to the subject of UFOs. The History Channel began with *The UFO Files* at 8pm and at 10pm, the Discovery Channel launched *The World's Strangest UFO Stories*.

Both shows picked popular topics for their premieres and both programs had high production values, although *World's Strangest* had a jauntier, more humorous approach to the subject. The fact that major 'real-life' documentary channels chose to broadcast brand new series of this type clearly demonstrates that the UFO subject is far from dead. In fact the introduction to the Discovery Channel's effort stated that 'across the planet, tales of extra-terrestrial encounters appear to be on the increase'.

The UFO Files began with *Beyond The War of the Worlds* and was less about UFOs than it was about acclimating the general public to the existence of extra-terrestrial life.



We were given a history of science fiction, from the early days of astronomy to the discovery that the planets in the sky were other worlds, separate, but perhaps not dissimilar to the Earth. Nineteenth-century writers such as Jules Verne and HG Wells took the phenomenal advances of science at that time and adapted them into speculative works of fiction and fantasy.



In 1897, Wells published his third book and *The War of the Worlds* became a popular sensation. Its central idea that Martians invaded England, then the world's major superpower, and quickly decimated the might of the British Empire sent shockwaves through society. His striding, metal tripods that employed death rays and poison gas terrified the public and the book is just as popular today as it was over a hundred years ago.

A hefty section devoted itself to the infamous Orson Welles radio broadcast of 1938. This adaptation of Wells' novel had the Martians invading New Jersey and, with its use of the idiom of the 'breaking news' format, created panic amongst sections of the American population. Orson Welles made a public

apology, but this did not prevent others from trying the same methods and similar broadcasts in Ecuador in 1949, in which rioters killed 15 people, and Buffalo, New York in 1968, still caused a great deal of concern.



With the launch of unmanned probes to Mars in the Sixties and Seventies, humankind got its first close-up views of the Red Planet. What we saw was a world pockmarked with craters and with an atmosphere so thin that life as we know it would be impossible.

Then in 1976, the Viking Orbiter snapped what appeared to be a massive face on the Martian surface. The Cydonia Face caused a sensation and many believed it was an artificial construction. Later, more high resolution images from Mars Global Surveyor seemed to prove that the Face was nothing more than a mesa, a desert hill that simply looked like a face in a certain light. To this day, though, many researchers still believe that the Face is a remnant of some long-gone Martian civilisation.

The Viking landers touched down on the desolate plains of Mars and

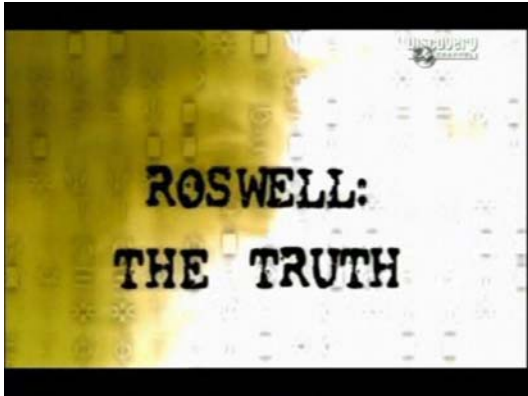
performed experiments that, at first, seemed to indicate the presence of life. These findings from one experiment were discarded, however, but its designer, Dr Gilbert Levin, stands by the results of the experiment to this day. This was conveniently omitted from the program.

As NASA continues its missions to Mars, building up to manned landings, it has become clear that we are going to find nothing resembling Wells' Martians there. This has not diluted the love that people have for Wells' *The War of the Worlds* in any way, though. This year, Steven Spielberg released his blockbuster version of the novel (although it was in reality a remake of the George Pal 1953 movie) and in 2007, a CGI movie version of the classic 1978 album, *Jeff Wayne's Musical Version of HG Wells' The War of the Worlds*, is scheduled for release.



While this program provided a fascinating history of the impact of Wells' novel, its value as a UFO documentary is less impressive. It *did* show how the population can be manipulated by the media into a frenzy of paranoia and panic with the threat of an alien invasion.

The World's Strangest UFO Stories began on the Discovery Channel at 10pm with a show entitled *Roswell: The Truth*. Comedian, Mark Williams, hosted the show and it was a light-hearted affair, despite the fact that it was a serious subject to many of the people involved.



After a history of the Roswell Incident, in which the Roswell Army Airfield (RAAF) issued an official press release stating that a flying disc had been captured on a ranch near the town of Roswell, New Mexico, we were introduced to Stanton Friedman, the man that brought the incident back into the limelight in 1978.

He told how he interviewed the intelligence officer of the RAAF, Major Jesse Marcel, and how he was informed that it was no weather balloon that crashed that fateful day in July, 1947, but a craft from another world. Marcel's son, also named Jesse and now a flight-surgeon in the US Air Force, also told how he handled pieces of debris from the crash and that it was not from a balloon, top secret or not.

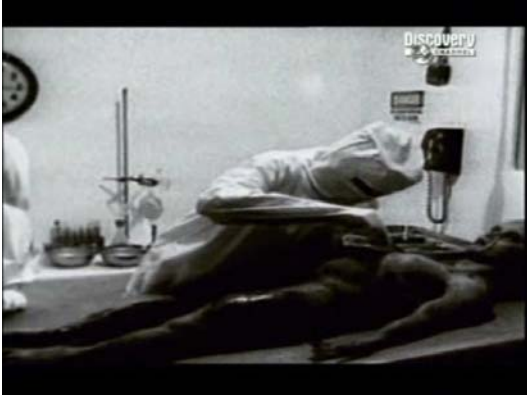
Thus began a rollercoaster ride of theories and speculation and debunking from such people as Nick Redfern, Dave Thomas, Tom Carey, Don Schmitt and even the townsfolk of Roswell themselves.

We heard about Project Mogul, a top secret project using balloons to carry huge trains of sensors into the sky to detect Soviet nuclear tests (even though the Soviets didn't detonate their first atomic bombs until 1949). We heard about alien bodies being recovered and how the families of those involved were threatened into silence.



We heard about experiments with Nazi technology and poor monkeys being sacrificed in such tests. We heard about multiple UFO crashes on that day. And we heard how UFO researchers are 'cashing in' on the story, while sceptics bemoan that they cannot demand a thousand dollars per lecture.

We were treated to footage of Ray Santilli's alien autopsy film and told how it still cannot be completely debunked.



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Two official, government reports explained away the incident in various ways utilising several projects that spanned many years, as proof. It was all a case of mistaken identity, wasn't it?

The show ended on a positive note. Roswell thrives on the publicity and subsequent tourism dollars. Ultimately, Williams said, if you believe that the Roswell Incident is a load of rubbish, then you have to believe that the people of the town that claim an alien spacecraft crashed there are either terribly mistaken or that they are lying – every single one of them... “and that's very hard to do.”

For a show called *Roswell: The Truth*, few truths were uncovered. But that's hardly surprising as the story has become more and more complex over the years. It did its level best to report what happened in an entertaining format and I think it did a good job. Sceptics and believers alike were given a fair shake of the stick and eventually, we are left to make up our own minds – which is how it should be.

Both series continue on their respective channels and we'll bring