

Dear Earth

by

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Dear Earth,

I'm looking at my souvenir. It's a snow-globe of Apollo 11; two plastic astronauts crammed up against a plastic landing module, the plastic flag flying high. It's tacky, I know, but it's all I've got to show for twenty years work.

I lived, disguised as a human, as an American, from 1950 to 1970, and let me tell you, McCarthyism didn't worry me nearly as much as 'The Invasion of the Body Snatchers'. There they were, larger than life, up there on the screen; the aliens. They looked like humans. They walked a little stiffly. They didn't have emotions. There were strange gaps in their knowledge of things that any human was sure to know. Yep, that was me — every detail. I just told people I was English.

I didn't react the ways that 'real people' reacted. Of course I didn't, how could I? I wasn't one.

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I was there, in the crowd, when President Kennedy announced the plan to land on the moon. You wouldn't have thought me lacking emotion that day. Oh, the relief! Finally, humankind was getting it! After all these years of watching and waiting you guys finally were getting your rear-ends in gear.

Now, I'll admit, my reaction was partly selfish. I'd had to make the choice, back in 1950. Which would it be, America or

Russia? I'd had to bet on which nation would be first to go. I didn't want to be in the wrong damn country!

I tell you, when that Sputnik went up I had indigestion for a month.

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July 11th 1969, the first moon-landing; what a day! I went down to the local diner. The owners dragged out their television and stood it by one end of the counter. There were people standing on chairs to look over each other's shoulders. I sat at the back watching the smiling crowd. I had a big grin on my face too, for a different reason.

I was there to do a job, a really simple job, but one that required care and patience.

I worked for a company – still do. The company bought the contact rights for your planet. Perhaps I should explain what that means.

When the inhabitants of any planet start to explore space they soon run into their neighbors. Most of them are friendly; some are not. So there's a kind of interplanetary clearing-house that appoints trustworthy races to go and meet the newcomers and help guide them through that awkward transition from being the Prize Pig to being the runt of a very large litter.

We won the bidding for the rights to actually perform the first contact with the Earth, and would have preferential access to the human business community – the usual deal.

The trickier parts of my job were to learn enough about the way you humans behave, to assess how you would react to being contacted by another race and work out where it should best take place.

I learned early on how you would react. I saw how you react to each other. Oh boy, were we in trouble! I went to the movies and saw 'The Day the Earth Stood Still', promptly ruling out a landing in the center of Washington DC.

In the diner, watching my neighbors watching Neil Armstrong, that's when I knew how we should do it. It was an ideal set-up; the world was watching. We should do it right there, on the moon, in front of the global TV audience. How would it be, I thought, if during a live transmission our guys walked over the edge of a hill and came and shook the human astronaut's hands?

Yep, that was the way to do it. We could come right into the living rooms, the diners, the bars and coffee houses and say "Hi, we're out here too."

At the end of July of 1969, solely on my recommendation, we had fixed our rendezvous for the Fra Mauro Formation and Apollo 13.

The team was all in place, in April of 1970, when Apollo 13 got into trouble. I panicked, worrying that someone would suggest it was the result of an alien attack. You can understand my concern, I hope. If something goes wrong and then these strangers appear out of nowhere... well, humans tend to add two and two to make five.

I recommended skipping at least one or two landings, letting the humans get their confidence back, then we'd meet them. The humans would be there eventually - but meeting the next mission, especially at the same site would look, in human eyes, suspicious.

But all through 1970 NASA was talking about cutting back, reorganizing the missions. It took a really short time for

my indigestion to become chronic. It was a nightmare, like shooting a moving target. All the while there was an expensive base full of bored colleagues just waiting up there.

NASA proposed Apollo 18 would land at Copernicus, and I actually thought "Great! Maybe that would be even better; much better location for filming, grander vistas. Woo-hoo!"

So during July and August of 1970 the team moved the base. They covered their tracks as best they could in Cone Crater at Fra Mauro and went over to Copernicus. Now Apollo 18 wasn't due for two years, that was okay, really... I had them set up, mothball the base and leave until I called them back.

But I only had to wait one month, until September rolled around. Apollos 18 and 19 were cancelled.

You have no idea how sensitive companies are to cost overruns on this kind of deal. Keeping a team idle for months was bad, moving the base was worse, moving the base again to some undecided location at some undecided time was never going to fly at Head Office.

I watched Apollos 14 through 17 visit an empty moon, and you didn't go back.

Our options on the Earth have since expired. We had to move on. You guys cost us a lot of money and I spent twenty years scouting you out.

I hope I've made you feel suitably guilty.

I still give the snow-globe an occasional shake.

See you out there, someday.