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Review of *Little Gray Men: Roswell and the Rise of a Popular Culture* By Toby Smith

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Little Gray Men: Roswell and the Rise of a Popular Culture. By Toby Smith. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2000. Credits, index. xi + 199 pp. \$24.95

If you are looking for a definitive summary on the latest scientific evidence for or against the occurrence of what has come to be called the “Roswell Incident”—the crash and government retrieval of a flying saucer and alien bodies near Roswell, New Mexico, in 1947—then Toby Smith’s *Little Gray Men* is not for you. The book is not a detailed analysis of the incident itself; in fact, Smith takes it as a given that the alien crash did *not* occur. Instead, the author places Roswell in a larger cultural and historical context, making the case that Roswell is an icon, not just for human yearning for life beyond this planet, but also for government conspiracies, Cold War tensions, and even sightings of Elvis.

The author delights in exploring the byways of Roswellian culture—for example, how old-timers pronounce the town’s name as “Rozzul” when not among outsiders. He identifies one key event as solidifying Roswell’s lock on UFO’s and aliens—the fact that, however briefly or erroneously, the United States Government announced it had obtained a real-

life *flying saucer*. When Paul Harvey finally got around to mentioning the Roswell UFO on his noon broadcast, Smith says, “up and down the Pecos Valley it was akin to hearing a papal blessing.”

The chapters of the book are intriguing side trips into various aspects of Roswell’s culture. Roswell’s founding, the town’s invisible black community, and the career of Roswell’s rocketry pioneer Robert Goddard are examined, and a vivid description of Roswell’s fiftieth anniversary “UFO Encounter ’97” is provided. The role of Ohio’s Wright-Patterson Air Force Base as the alleged repository of alien ships and bodies is the subject of an entire chapter. Smith discusses the impact of Hollywood reporter Frank Scully’s tabloid saucer book (about a saucer crash in Aztec, NM), and how it was a key link in the inexorable chain leading to *Captain Video*, *Forbidden Planet*, *Lost in Space*, *Star Trek*, and all the way to modern films like *The Rock* and *Independence Day*. An interview with science fiction legend Jack Williamson covers a range of interests. The book concludes with a glimpse of Roswell as Legend, in the same vein as tales of the vampire Dracula, or the return of the King (Elvis, of course).

Little Gray Men will probably not be appreciated by those whose living stems from studying the alleged saucer crash. But it’s a delightful romp through the alleyways of society and culture, grappling with the fascinating question of how a quiet, conservative rural town has become Ground Zero in humanity’s quest for neighbors “out there.”

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