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Music Out of Orbit

Everyone had the same reaction: laughter, “Just like in the movies” they said, “just like that one, what’s it called? You know the one, with the aliens and the music, close encounters, that’s it, “*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.” When the message went out, across all the radios, TVs, and every social media platform, people thought it was a joke.

“Must have taken some doing” they said to each other, “Didn’t they do something like this with *War of the Worlds*, fooled people too.” Which would be met with, “People back then were idiots, wouldn’t fool me, aliens playing music, have you ever heard something so stupid, it’s not even believable.”

After a few days it was clear that it wasn’t a joke, as the broadcasts kept coming, and more and more scientists started to become excited by the music; the music that had been picked up by a satellite from out of space. It can be described very accurately as *alien* music. It didn’t sound like anything composed or played on earth, in tone, rhythm, instrumentation, and compositional style it was completely and utterly: alien.

Lots of people examined it, from scientists to musicologists, hell, even Jools Holland played it on his show, and managed to jam along to it on piano – well, just about. It was all anyone could talk about for weeks; the hysteria only heightened when the next message was intercepted. This time it was a voice, it spoke in a guttural language, all grunts and barks. After a minute or so music again started playing, it was different to the first piece, but only slightly.

The world’s best linguistic specialists started trying to understand the language, see what it was saying. People speculated, was it a distress call, a message, a warning, the harbinger of invasion. Across the world governments met to theorize and plan, while the sales of tinfoil trebled.

As the weeks went by more and more broadcasts kept being intercepted, always the same; dialogue in a strange alien tongue, interspersed with music. As governments continued trying to understand the language, people’s paranoia grew; and then, the conspiracies started.

That’s perhaps a lie, they had always been there. Lurking on the edge of *YouTube*, and in the depths of *4Chan*. Now, they were catapulted into the mainstream. The governments were lying to the people; they had decoded the messages but were keeping it a secret; they were plotting to sell the population into slavery to the aliens, in exchange for their freedom... the claims went on, and on.

After a while news stations started to run stories and interview the conspiracy theorists. Suddenly these people were in the limelight; they were having rallies, getting celebrity endorsements; people were listening to what they had to say, and what they had to say was dangerous. The world became a powder keg of mistrusts, and it took one little match to set it off; the matches name was Henry Wizal.

Henry was a conspiracy nut, he had always been interested in aliens, and broadcast videos from Nevada, usually in the deserts near Area 51. He had been convinced for years that the government had aliens in Area 51, probably from Mars, but maybe Venus, he wasn’t sure.

Well, after the business with the music, he became a hit; he was interviewed in local news, then national, he was even given a spot on Ellen. So, bolstered by populist support for his theories he decided to do the impossible; to enter Area 51, and live stream it.

So, on the 26th of October 2019, he did just that, or tried to. He had a camera hooked up to a helmet and was live streaming through YouTube to the world. Millions watched, as he walked through the desert, his voice a constant commentary.

He passed, the signs, warning anyone that beyond this point, “Lethal force” would be used to stop them from entering. His camera settled on it for a moment, before everyone watching saw two fingers raised at the sign, in an act of defiance. He got about 100 ft in when with a whizz a bullet took him down, the feed went dead – and the world: exploded.

For many this act of violence confirmed what they had been considering, that the governments were indeed hiding something. For those, like Henry, who had believed from the beginning it gave a purpose: revenge.

It started small, a few protests, placards with slogans like, “Give us the truth”, “Justice for Henry”, and, “#thoughtsandprayers”. It was only a matter of time before someone cast the first stone, the result: biblical. Rioting all over the US, government buildings were targeted, a mob tried to storm the Whitehouse, only turned away by the National Guard, soon the protesters were using more than rocks.

The world watched as America began to tear itself apart from the inside; it was too busy watching to see the growing unrest in its own people. Each country had a Henry, a catalyst, that released a wave of anger, mistrust, and violence which had been festering under the surface of society for decades.

It was almost a month later, when the call went out, across the radios, TVs, and social media of the world. We’ve done it, cracked it. A team of scientists in Switzerland had managed to work out the alien language, they had translated the messages and would broadcast them to the world. People waited, breath bated, as a voice read out, the message from across the stars, “thank you for tuning into Alpha Century 5. We are counting down our top ten galactic hits, stay tuned for Glarp and the Bizzards, from the Century Minor Nebula, with their latest hit, *Baby Don’t Give Up.*”

Critical Reflection

Trust, truth, and why people believe without evidence, or without demonstrable evidence, have been areas of interest for me for some time. In this story I wanted to explore how something seemingly innocent, which in the end turns out to be extraordinary, and at the same time mundane, can cause such worldwide paranoia.

It’s influenced by conspiracy theories, most obviously that area 51 in America is harbouring aliens, a theory which recently sparked an internet movement to storm it because, “they can’t shoot all of us”. Which if it had happened, which it didn’t, would have meant that almost a million people, over 1.5 million signed up on Facebook, could have potentially risked their lives, martyrs to cause with little to no actual proof.

Of course, this was a joke, but this kind of belief without proof can have potentially deadly consequences, for example Pizzagate. A conspiracy that a restaurant had a basement out of which they ran, among other things a human trafficking ring, without any proof, the restaurant didn’t even have a basement. This lie was spread across the internet, and subsequently the restaurant received numerous threats, culminating in 2016 with a man a shooting rifle at the restaurant. This story then can stand as a warning against blind dogmatic belief, which can in real life, as in the story, have potentially deadly consequences.