

“CALLING OCCUPANTS OF INTERPLANETARY CRAFT”

Here's the strange story of a strange man who inspired a strange band to write a strange song that later became a minor hit for the Carpenters.

SPACEY MEN

In the early 1970s, three young musicians from Toronto—John Woloschuk, Dee Long, and Terry Draper—formed the “space rock” band Klaatu. The name was inspired by the peaceful alien ambassador from the 1951 film, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, who warned mankind about its warring ways: “Your choice is simple—join us and live in peace, or pursue your present course and face obliteration.”

While working on their first album, Klaatu's fascination with aliens brought them in contact with a 1967 book called *The Flying Saucer Reader*. That's where they learned about an odd man named Alfred K. Bender, a scissors salesman at the Acme Shearing Company in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

HELLO UP THERE!

In 1952, the year after *The Day the Earth Stood Still* hit theaters, humans didn't yet know that Mars, Venus, and other nearby planets were unable to support life. The chances of an alien landing—Klaatu style—still seemed very real. With reports of “flying saucers” coming in from all over the planet, Bender wanted to send the E.T.s a message that humans are friendly. But he knew he couldn't do it alone, so he formed the International Flying Saucer Bureau (IFSB).

After recruiting thousands of members from all over Earth, Bender sent out a newsletter announcing “World Contact Day.” The instructions: At 6 p.m. on March 15, 1953, every IFSB member was to simultaneously “send out a message to visitors from space.” How? *Telepathically*. Here's the message:

Calling occupants of interplanetary craft! Calling occupants of interplanetary craft that have been observing our planet EARTH. We of IFSB wish to make contact with you. We are your friends, and would

like you to make an appearance here on EARTH. Your presence before us will be welcomed with the utmost friendship. We will do all in our power to promote mutual understanding between your people and the people of EARTH. Please come in peace and help us in our EARTHLY problems. Give us some sign that you have received our message. Be responsible for creating a miracle here on our planet to wake up the ignorant ones to reality. Let us hear from you. We are your friends.

World Contact Day came and went...and the aliens didn't land. Shortly afterward, however, Bender claims to have been visited by "Men in Black" who told him to stop looking for aliens...or else. So he retired from the E.T. business and disbanded the IFSB. But ever since then, members have been trying to keep the message of World Contact Day alive and well. The movement might have faded completely into obscurity had it not been for Klaatu.

ULTRA-EMMISARIES

In 1976, after reading about Bender and the IFSB, Klaatu drummer Terry Draper asked his bandmates, "What if we turned the Message into a hit song with mucho airplay? Maybe the radio waves would reach the aliens. Mankind's puny brains didn't do much." (At least that's how Draper recalls his pitch.) So the band started working on "Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft (Recognized Anthem Of World Contact Day)." That's the actual title.

It begins with the sounds of crickets, birds, and other forest creatures, and soon footsteps can be heard walking through the brush. Then a needle is dropped on a record and the spacey music begins, followed shortly by an angelic voice singing:

In your mind you have abilities you know

To telepath messages through the vast unknown

Please close your eyes and concentrate

With every thought you think

Upon the recitation we're about to sing:

Calling occupants of interplanetary craft

Calling occupants of interplanetary, quite extraordinary craft!

BUSY SIGNAL

The song opened Klaatu's debut album, *3:47 EST* (the time of day in *The Day the Earth Stood Still* that Klaatu landed on Earth). It was a minor hit in Canada and the U.S., and not enough to convince the aliens to land.

It did, however, reach the ears of one of the most famous groups of the day, the Carpenters. In the summer of 1977, as another space movie, *Star Wars*, was breaking box office records, the Carpenters' cover version of "Calling Occupants of Interplanetary Craft (Recognized Anthem Of World Contact Day)" reached #32 on the pop chart. It even spawned a 1978 TV special: *The Carpenters...Space Encounters*.

But still, the aliens didn't respond.

Don't give up hope, though—the movement is still active. In March 2013, on the 60th anniversary of the first World Contact Day, the event was stretched out to an entire week. Still no aliens, though. Perhaps it's time for another cover version of "Calling All Occupants" to be sent out into the vast unknown...

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THE BEATLES/KLAATU SNAFU

When Klaatu released *3:47 EST*, they wanted to "let the music speak for itself," so they didn't include any personal information in the liner notes. It only said, "All words and music by Klaatu." While the boys were in England promoting the album, something interesting took place back in the U.S. and Canada: Rumors began circulating that "Klaatu" was a ruse—that this was actually a lost Beatles album recorded in 1967 between *Revolver* and *Sgt. Pepper*.

The rumor, started by an American radio station, goes that the tapes were lost because Paul McCartney had faked his death and the songs were recorded in secret. When the tapes were "found" 10 years later, the Fab Four didn't want to deal with the inevitable hype, so they convinced Capitol Records (their North American label) to release the album without any reference to the Beatles. The fact that the songs "Calling All Occupants" and "Sub-Rosa Subway" sound like they could be Lennon-McCartney songs only fueled the rumors. There was no truth to them, obviously, but it must have been flattering for Klaatu to be mistaken for the most successful rock act of all time.