



WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT UFOs

By J. Allen Hynek

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One of the world's foremost experts on the UFO phenomenon separates the facts from fantasy and tells

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by J. Allen Hynek

SOME TIME AGO, in a Dayton newspaper, I came across a column entitled "By George." A reader had written in: "Dear George, I am looking for proof that Unidentified Flying Objects exist. Somebody said that you had information on this matter. Do Unidentified Flying Objects exist? And what, exactly, are they?" It was signed simply "Student."

The answer came back: "Dear Student, Unidentified Flying Objects do exist. Obviously, if we knew what they were, they would no longer be Unidentified Flying Objects. They would be Identified Flying Objects. Think, man, think." Signed "George."

There is a great deal to that. The incontrovertible fact is that UFO reports do exist. They exist all over the world; it's a global phenomenon. And the reports fit fairly definite patterns. It's a popular misconception that they are all a matter of imagination. Actually, if they were a matter of imagination only, I would say that people are using their imaginations

rather poorly. We don't get reports of Unidentified Sailing Objects. Hardly ever do we get reports of UFOs with wheels. We don't get reports of pink elephants flying sideways, or upside down. If it were all imagination, I think we would get some reports like that, perhaps a report that the Taj Mahal was seen in Brooklyn. It is absolutely certain that four fifths of the unprocessed raw reports do not represent UFOs at all; they represent IFOs, Identified Flying Objects. Right now, Venus is giving us a lot of trouble. Venus is the bright object in the western sky after sunset. We are getting reports from fairly reliable people who just don't know a planet from a hole in the ground. But that's not unusual. As a matter of fact, during both world wars a good number of rounds of ammunition were wasted on Venus, because all sides thought it was a spy device of the enemy.

One fifth of all UFO reports *do* meet the stringent criteria of unexplainability within the present scientific framework. It's these reports that I am going to be discussing. I would like to define them as reports, fitting the general pattern, which remain unexplained even after severe technical scrutiny. In other words, it's only those that really remain unidentified after thorough investigation that are eligible to be called UFOs.

I was hired by the Air Force way back in 1948 when I was teaching astronomy at Ohio State University. The Air Force needed an astronomer to help them weed out those reports that could logically be explained as astronomical in nature—meteors, twinkling stars, bright planets and so forth. I found that of all the reports submitted, about one third could be explained as astronomical in nature. It's surprising how untutored people are, in general, about what can be seen in the sky. Now, although that's where my particular area of involvement ended, I was, nonetheless, naturally curious. There is another area, another third of all reports that are non-astronomical in nature, but suggestive of other explanations, balloons, aircraft, and flares, for example. Then, there's the remaining

third, non-astronomical with no evident explanation, and in many of these, lack of evidence precluded an explanation. What do you do with a report that says that some dear lady who got up to go to the bathroom at two o'clock in the morning saw a light out the window? Well, there's nothing you can do about it. But there are other cases, where you *can* do something, where evidence is at hand or where there is indeed an opportunity for investigation. About twenty percent of all reports fall into this category: "Evidence Offered Suggests No Explanation."

Now that twenty percent is somewhat at variance with what the official Air Force public releases would say. They maintained that they explained all but three percent. Then they indulged in some very interesting circular reasoning. They argued that since only three percent remained unexplained, if they tried harder, they could also, undoubtedly, explain that three percent. They completed their argument by pointing out that since they knew that, why try? Not exactly a scientific approach.

Their statistics were a travesty. For instance, a sergeant would usually classify the reports, sometimes as "probable balloons." At other times, if an object had a light, well, aircraft have lights. Therefore, "possible aircraft." At the end of the year, when the statistics were compiled, those little telltale important words, "probable" and "possible" were dropped.

When I remonstrated with them, they said. "We can't have a lot of categories. After all, there's no such thing as a possible balloon. It's either a balloon or it isn't." The military mind is rather interesting in that way. Webster, you know, gives three definitions of intelligence—human, animal and military.

The fact remains that twenty percent of the reports received remained unexplained. And the percentage has remained about the same up to today. When you read about a UFO in the paper or you talk with someone who says he has seen one, even today, the chances are four out of five that he has

seen an IFO and not a UFO.

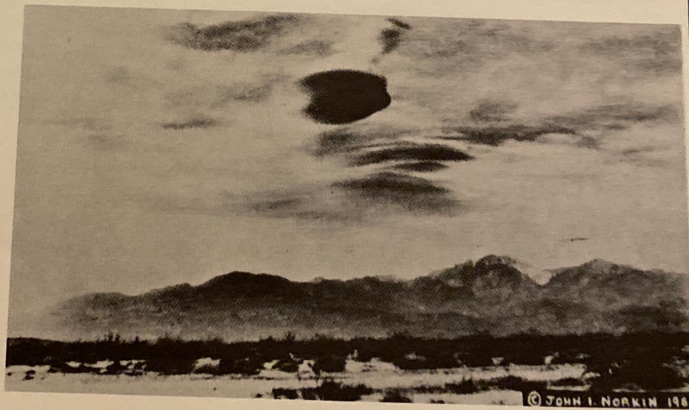
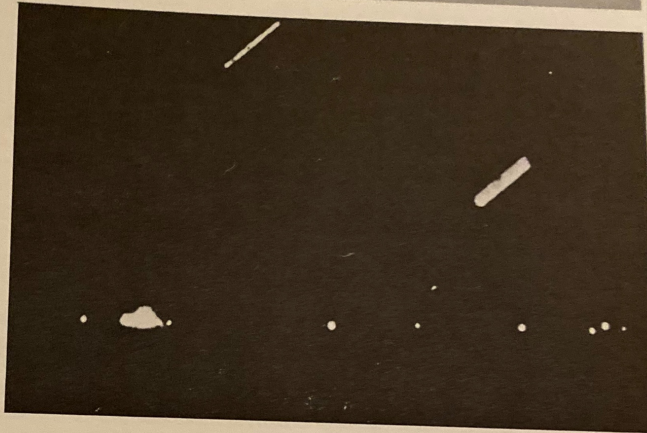
In my collection I have hundreds of beautiful pictures of flying saucers that turn out to be IFOs not UFOs. The people who took one photograph were honest enough to say they didn't see the object when they took the photo, but when they got it back from the corner drugstore, lo and behold, there it was. And cameras don't lie, you know. But close examination of the photo showed that the saucer is nothing more than a conical wall lamp, and the glow underneath, a reflection on a wall. When the photographer set the camera down, it clicked again, and the camera photographed the only bright object in the room, namely a wall lamp.

Another photo that appeared in newspapers all over the country as a photo of genuine flying saucers, really amounted to nothing more than a time exposure of the rising crescent moon and Venus.

Still another—that nearly appeared in a prominent national magazine, although I was fortunate in being able to stop it in the nick of time—turned out to be the moon.

Another man sent me a photo of a lenticular cloud. I had a lot of trouble with him. He insisted that it was really a flying saucer and not a cloud. Finally, after a lot of correspondence, I convinced him that it was a cloud. But he wasn't going to give up so easily. He came right back and said, "Yes, but the flying saucer is inside."

These examples of natural phenomena being mistaken for UFOs lead me to my next point. They represent one of several factors that combine to make the subject of UFOs unpalatable to the scientific fraternity. I can't really blame the scientific fraternity. First of all, they are busy with their own work. Furthermore, when faced with incredible tales, they know that four fifths of them are explainable, and that the field has also attracted a remarkable number of kooks and crackpots who espouse the subject because it fulfills some inner psychological need. Faced with all this, many scientists simply ridicule the entire matter, even



Identified Flying Objects

Weird as they may seem, the objects here pictured are all easily explained by J. Allen Hynek. (Top) The bright light hanging over the top of the hill is really the glow from an ordinary lamp; the photo, an accidental double exposure. (Middle) It may look like a lineup of UFOs, but it's really a time exposure of the rising crescent moon and Venus. (Bottom) An ordinary lenticular cloud can look quite out of the ordinary to an untrained observer.

though ridicule is not a part of the scientific method.

But are these UFO reports *all* tales told by idiots signifying nothing? I've given you my definition of a UFO. But there's another that's quite good. General Sanford, in a press conference once, perhaps inadvertently gave a remarkably good definition. He said a UFO report is an incredible tale told by a credible person. That has been my experience also, over the course of many years. Clearly the credibility of witnesses is of paramount importance.

The rule of thumb I have applied is to ask the question: Are these the sort of witnesses whose testimony would be accepted in a court of law under any other circumstances? Generally, I've found that they would be. When you have air traffic controllers, pilots, policemen, school teachers, public officials, and just good, solid, respected citizens reporting strange things, you have a choice. You can call them all liars or crazy, as I did for quite a few years. Or you can say that they merely have experienced a phenomenon for which they have no reference point, rather like an Australian aborigine reporting a 747 back to his tribe, and not being believed.

So the crux of the matter is to ask: Did what these solid citizens report as happening indeed happen?

UFO witnesses do not seem to represent any particular class in society. You can't say that any particular economic, educational or social level is UFO-prone. There seems to be a pretty good cross section of people in general. Yet it is disturbing that occasionally one comes across a UFO-prone person who is otherwise quite sane. The frequency of sightings is way above chance. Mostly such persons are apt to be psychically sensitive, to have had paranormal experiences. One person I know, who is in charge of quality control for an electronics company, has told me of over 100 UFO sightings. I doubt that *all* of these were aircrafts and planets. But *many* and large UFO witnesses represent a cross section of society, and they are not in the habit of experiencing para-

normal phenomena.

With this rather lengthy but necessary introduction out of the way, let's proceed directly to the reported evidence. I have been able to put about 95 percent of the reports into six basic categories. I'd like to look at each of these categories by citing just a few of many, many reports that are quite representative.

Nocturnal Lights

The characteristics of nocturnal lights, quite simply, are that their behavior—trajectory and dynamics—is not explainable in terms of a satellite re-entry, a missile, a lighted balloon, an aircraft, and so forth. Only when all possible explanations fail can they be classified as nocturnal lights. One such incident occurred outside of Fargo, North Dakota. I investigated it personally. In fact, almost any case I speak of I have investigated personally. I don't like to speak from hearsay, newspaper reports, or magazine accounts. I went to Fargo to interview the people who photographed the light. It had happened on a cold, clear night in February. Two young men, who happened to be equipped with a Polaroid camera, were returning to Fargo when from the middle of a snow-covered, corn-stubbed field, there arose a glowing, nearly spherical "object" which rose rapidly upward. Two pictures were taken of the light as it rose from the field into the sky, where it just disappeared.

Daylight Discs

The second category is what I call Daylight Discs. Over the past twenty-five years, we've had many reports of these. They've consistently been reported in the same general form. The term "flying saucers" really is traceable to this phenomenon. I have hundreds of photos of daylight discs, but a photograph is no better than the person who gives it to you. All you can say is that you have been unable to prove that the photograph is a fake. A case which I investigated quite thoroughly occurred sixty-five miles southwest of Calgary, in Canada. Three prospectors were coming

home, and one of them happened to have a camera, loaded with film, in his pack. We got hold of both the camera and the original negative, and we had both analyzed in detail. There is no question that the image on the photo is a real image. Now, sailing garbage can lids could give you a real image too, but the likelihood of someone sixty-five miles southwest of Calgary, in brush country, sailing garbage pail covers in the sky is rather small.

I went to Calgary, hired a small plane and flew over the area to satisfy myself that it was indeed brush country. It was. The enlargement of that photo illustrates a shape that has been described to me many, many times over.

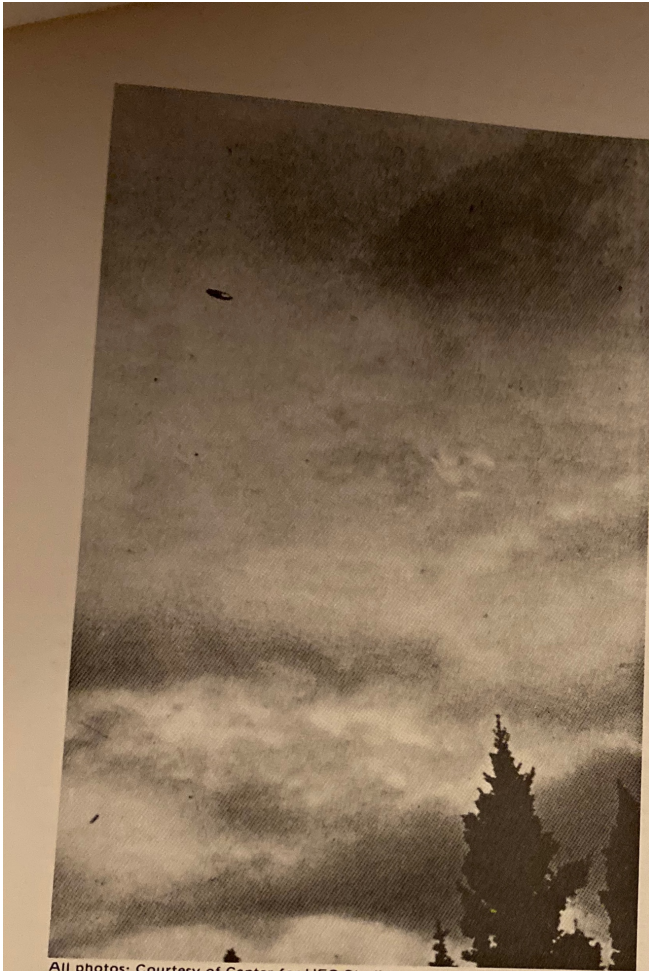
One of the questions I always ask when investigating a report is this: "What common object that you might find around the house would most closely resemble what you saw in general shape and appearance?" I get some very interesting answers.

A nurse from Central Wisconsin said, "Well, you know those saucers that kids ride down the hill on? Take two of those, put one on top the other, with a separator, and that's as close as I could describe it."

A man in Massachusetts said it looked like a silvery hamburger sandwich with the meat sticking out from the edges.

Daylight discs are reported to sometimes approach the ground, but they generally do not land. Instead, they hover a few feet above the ground, sometimes making a humming sound. Apparently, if there is any intelligence behind these discs, it knows something about the inertial properties of matter that we don't. These things are reported to behave in a seeming defiance of gravity.

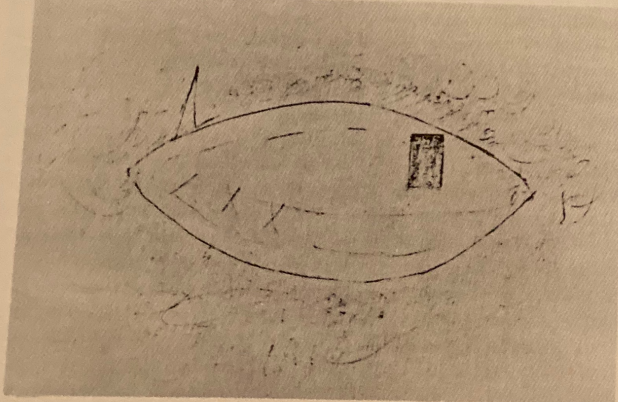
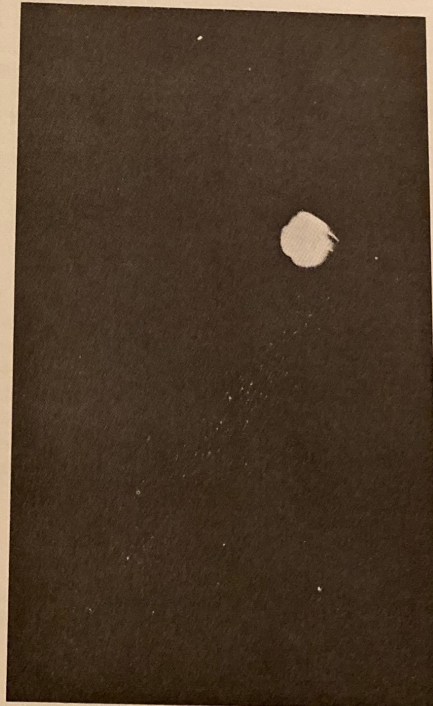
We've received a few reports, not many, in which a large object, sort of torpedo-shaped, will come along. Generally it tips up vertically a bit, and from its end will come an entire group of saucers that will fly around the countryside, then rejoin the larger object, which will then move off. So help me, this has been reported—in one case, witnessed



All photos: Courtesy of Center for UFO Studies

Unidentified Flying Objects

In spite of the most severe scrutiny, these photos represent the unexplainable. (Top Left) A prospector snapped this photo of a daylight disc—better known as a flying saucer—65 miles southwest of Calgary in Canada. (Bottom Left) An Illinois farmwife's rendering of what she and her children saw. (Below) A year ago, in Saskatchewan, this eleven-foot-in-diameter ring was photographed at the site of a reported UFO landing. (Bottom Right) A nocturnal light photographed over a North Dakota field.



by one hundred farmers in France. The smaller objects behave as if they could be sensors cruising around to see what it's all about. Typically, when they fly they seem to do so in an oscillatory manner; and when they are coming down they are reported to move like falling leaves, a sort of pendulum motion. Again, I must observe that if all UFO reports were products of imagination, I think we would have a wide spectrum of reports, instead of those that fall, in about 95 percent of the cases, into a few specific categories.

Radar Visual Cases

The third category of UFOs encompasses the radar visual cases. Let me tell you about one. A few years ago, I was visiting Australia, and I was having a conference with the Royal Australian Air Force Intelligence. They were quite interested in the UFO subject. Well, when the formal conference was over, the Deputy Director got me aside and told me about his UFO experience. That happens so many times. People won't mention their experiences publicly, but in private they'll tell all about it. He said that he had been flying one clear and beautiful night when he noticed, off to his left wing tip, a rather brilliant object. He told me that he was not about to call the tower because he felt he would probably be called in to see the head-shrinker and given a month's rest without pay. But when he noticed there was a second object off to his right wing tip, he decided that he had better contact the tower. So mustering all of the "cool" that he could, he called in and asked if there was any other traffic in his area. The answer came back, "Yes. There are two other craft. In fact, you are the middle blip." He told me, "You know, I could have kissed those radar guys."

We recently got a report from Mexico City that a pilot has had a similar experience. It hasn't been investigated yet; it's still a report. And I hear through the grapevine that there was a similar incident at Wright Patterson. This is something we would very much like to investigate. But it's

hard to get anything out of the Air Force.

Close Encounters

The next in my six categories of UFOs is the first of three that I have labeled close encounters. All close encounters are exactly that. A person experiences a UFO within such a close distance that he would really have to be crazy to mistake Venus for what he sees. In a great show of imagination I have divided close encounters into three categories and I've called them close encounters of the first kind, of the second kind, and of the third kind.

In close encounters of the first kind there is no interaction with the environment. The witnesses experience the UFO in close proximity, and that's about it. One such report was thoroughly investigated by a friend of mine who grew up in the small town in central Illinois, where the sighting occurred. He had known this family for some twenty years.

The story is that the woman was in the kitchen when the kids came running in yelling, "Mama, Mama, there's something funny going on." So she walked outside, and indeed, there was a silvery, football-shaped object fairly close to the ground. They said it just missed the barn as it moved at about twenty miles an hour. It was silent. It moved across the field, and stopped over a grove of trees, hovered there silently, then ascended vertically straight up. Each of the children and the mother drew pictures of what the object looked like. The mother included a haze around the object; and this is not unusual. We've had reports that the UFO develops a sort of plasma or cloud around it; sometimes this cloud becomes so dense that it obscures the object, and then, the entire cloud just disappears as though it were going into another dimension. I say "as though." It disappears rather like the cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland*.

At any rate, that's an example of close encounter of the first kind. No photographs were taken; no residue was left; nothing was there that could be studied after the fact.

Close encounters of the second kind are very interesting; they are the ones that the Center is studying particularly. In fact, we have a small grant from the Research Corporation of America to study this particular kind of UFO. In these cases, some interaction does take place between the UFO and the environment, either animate or inanimate. Now, for an example. This is incredible, I warn you. But essentially, I am acting as a reporter for what has been told me and what I have studied; the decision is entirely yours as to what you think about this.

It happened last September in Saskatchewan. The Center is even turning out a full technical report on this case. When we first heard about it, the witness, a farmer, indicated that he had been raping his crop. This made him seem to me a rather unreliable sort of witness. But it turned out that there is something known as rapeseed crop. He was swathing it with a tractor, mowing it down. He got to about fifty feet of the edge of the field, looked up, and saw what at first he thought was a duck blind.

Now I have to take a moment here to make an observation. Time after time, people, and particularly psychologists, will say to me: "Hynek, after all, people see what they want to see. They will project and deliberately see what they want to see." I have to simply say that that has not been my experience. The better the witness, the more technically trained, the more he tries to explain his experience to himself at first. It happens so often that I've even developed a term for it, "escalation of hypothesis." They'll say, "At first I thought it was an airplane;" or "At first I thought it was a balloon;" or a duck blind.

Back to our farmer. He got off the tractor and walked toward the object, to within fifteen feet of it, when he realized it wasn't a duck blind. It was a hemisphere, flat on the bottom, hovering above the grass and spinning in a clockwise direction. At that point, he was clearly dumbfounded, and he walked backward. He told us that under no circumstances would he have turned

...heard to his swather, climbed back on, and taking a really good look around, he saw four other such objects, all the same size, and all spinning in a clockwise direction. Then, they all lifted straight up, in a sort of echelon type formation. They lifted up to about two hundred feet above him, aligned themselves in a north-south line, stopped spinning, and remained there for about two minutes. They then ascended vertically through a rather low cloud covering (it was daytime, Sunday morning, around eleven o'clock) and they simply disappeared.

Now, when he regained his composure, he walked over to where the objects had been, and at exactly those places, he found eleven-foot-in-diameter rings in which the grass had been matted down in a clockwise direction. When our man got there about a week later, the imprints were still quite evident.

Now, what do you do about an event such as that? It was reported to the scientific bureau in Ottawa, and the scientists there, without even looking at the pictures, said that it undoubtedly was fungus. That is characteristic of an entire attitude. Scientists, who should be curious about strange things, all too often grab at the handiest nearby label and paste it on such phenomena, assuming that the problem is thus neatly solved.

There are many other stories, many similar. Sometimes the objects leave markings on the ground. In this particular case, when we took samples of the ring soil, it would not accept water. It was absolutely hydrophobic, and looked quite different from the rest of the soil. At Oak Ridge they have kindly examined it with a 250,000 power electron microscope and found rather interesting, long crystalline spindles, needles, in the soil. The surrounding soil was also examined and not a trace of the crystalline spindles was present.

There are also many cases of encounters of the second kind where animals are affected. In fact, in some cases the witnesses tell me that the first sign they had of something strange going on was the effect on an animal—a cat that begins to bat his head against the

wall or horses raising a fuss in the barn. One bull, in New York, was tethered to an iron bar, and in trying to get away from whatever it was, he literally bent the bar, even though the hoop was through his nose. He must have been quite frightened.

Finally, we come to our sixth UFO category, close encounters of the third kind. These are cases in which humanoids or creatures are reported. Again, I want to stress the fact that I've never seen one myself, and I'm not quite sure what I would do if I did. But the fact is that they are reported. We now have thousands of such reports in our files at the Center. All we need are the funds to do some good pattern studies.

One such incident occurred in New Hampshire last year. When a man went outside to investigate a strange light, he called his dog—a vicious dog, we know that from personal experience—he saw that the light was coming from two strange creatures who were picking up rocks, and putting them into a bag. The dog rushed out at these two, got half way there, stopped, his hair stood on end, and he came whimpering back.

Another example of close encounters of the third kind led me to New Guinea two years ago to investigate the report, even though it had occurred some time ago. I was intrigued by this case, and since I was going around the world anyway, I stopped at Port Moresby and took a little mission plane to a place called Raba Raba which means "far, far away." Then, I traveled to the little mission, where the sighting occurred, in an outrigger. I was able to interrogate six of the witnesses through an interpreter, and I went to Melbourne to talk with Father Gill, a missionary who had witnessed the incident as well.

Father Gill, a very methodical Anglican priest, laconic and unexcitable, was in his study when one of the natives came running in to say that something strange was outside. Since Father Gill had been making notes, he calmly took his notebook and pencil, went outside, and took notes of the entire event, including specific times, down to the minute. I have a copy of those notes.

And in our taped conversation, he says, "As we watched it, men came out from the object and appeared on the top of it, on what seemed to be a deck on top of this huge disc. There were four men in all, and there's no doubt that the figures were human. Two of them seemed to be doing something near the center of the deck. They were occasionally bending over and raising their arms as though adjusting or setting up something. One figure seemed to be standing, looking down at us. There were about a dozen of us at the time. I stretched my arm above my head and waved. To our surprise, the figure did the same. Ananias waved both arms over his head and then the two outside figures did the same. Ananias and I began waving our arms, and all four seemed to wave back. There seemed to be no doubt that our movements were answered. All the mission boys made audible gasps. After a further two or three minutes, the figures apparently lost interest in us, for they disappeared below deck. At 6:25 p.m., two figures reappeared to carry on with whatever they were doing before the interruption."

Well, I've had long conversations with Father Gill and I simply cannot find anything to besmirch his character. He's solid; the other witnesses are solid. And furthermore, this is only one case, there are hundreds of others.

I've looked rather quickly at those six basic categories. But now, let's ask ourselves what bold departures, what quantum jumps in our present concepts are necessary to encompass the most often reported characteristics? If we now assume—and to me it's not a big assumption—that there is indeed something to the content of these reports; how would we fashion a hypothesis to encompass these things that have been reported?

One thing that would have to be incorporated is a call for a different understanding of gravitation and how to manipulate it, something we don't have. Another is an understanding of space and time, and how to manipulate them, also something we don't have. Still another is the ability to immobilize

people. Time and again we have received reports of paralysis, blindness, burns, nausea, headaches, and more, all of which are temporary. I don't know of any authenticated reports—although there have been reports—of permanent damage.

Now if we were to try to explain this phenomenon, no ordinary hypothesis would do. We must hypothesize either the ability to traverse time and space with physical vehicles in some way that we do not know, or some means whereby a distant intelligence can make itself manifest here, materialize here, without the need of actual physical transfer, as we do from Cape Canaveral to Mars for instance. We might ask ourselves if the source of intelligence is much closer, physically, than we imagine. We could hypothesize a plane of existence, a more tenuous world around us and through us, a form of matter operating on different quantum principles from ours so that transitions between the two forms of matter are forbidden. But just as forbidden transitions in physics are not really forbidden but merely have a much lower probability of occurrence, so perhaps there are occasions where the barrier between the two worlds is let down temporarily, and we can have UFO experiences. This, of course, would very neatly answer the question: Where is the UFO now that was sighted last night?

Well, do we have to resort to such hypotheses? I have to say that hypotheses fully acceptable to the American Physical Society just won't do. They will not "gee" with the things that are reported any more than classical mechanics was able to explain atomic spectra, forcing us to call upon a new physics. What we must do, of course, is continue the study. Suppose we had asked Benjamin Franklin what made the sun shine. Ben might have offered all sorts of answers, one of which would probably have been: "I just don't know." But how could he possibly have thought that the sun was a nuclear energy device? When we consider that there are stars that are perhaps millions of years older than the

sun, it is possible that there are civilizations millions of years more advanced than ours. Consider that we have ourselves gone from the covered wagon to the 747 in about a century and a half, and in just seventy years from Kitty Hawk to the moon. It's just possible that civilizations several millions of years older might just know something about the physical and the psychic world that we do not. They might even know how to beam down objects or people as we see in the television series *Star Trek*. There may very well be some means of manifesting something physically to point B from point A without the necessity of traversing physically from point A to point B. I don't have the answer. I do know that we must continue our study.

Now I'm often asked if these UFOs do represent intelligence from elsewhere, why don't they contact us? Why don't they land on the White House lawn? Why don't they land en masse during half time at the Rose Bowl game? Well, in science, of course, you find out what the facts are and not what you want the facts to be. The fact is, upon examination, you find that the close encounter cases usually happen in isolated regions where there are no inhabitants. They just don't land in downtown Cincinnati, or downtown Brooklyn.

For a long while I thought that we could just sweep all of this under the carpet and say that it all had to be nonsense. That it couldn't be anything more. But I have been literally driven to the other conclusion.

Let me say this: suppose—remember now, I'm saying *suppose*; I'm not speaking as an astronomer now. This is pure science fiction—but suppose that in a million years NASA gets smart enough to explore another solar system, and they find a civilization on some planet that is similar to what ours was in Charlemagne's time, about 800 A.D. We would be smart enough, I think, to recognize the possibility of cultural shock. If we were to suddenly pepper them with sophisticated gadgetry and advanced accouterments the cultural shock might be tremendously bad. We

might decide to have a hundred-year period of indoctrination or acclimatization. We might condition them slowly, make appearances, and do strange things so that the people would gradually get used to us. We wouldn't land en masse on the White House lawn, so to speak. But we surely wouldn't travel the great distance involved to do prankish things like stopping cars and frightening animals. It would make no sense.

It could be that we are being conditioned. These reported strange incidents just could be a part of some overall purpose. As I said, this is science fiction. But I have often toyed with that idea.

I'm a little like the guy in *Dragnet* who says, "All we want are the facts, ma'am." And I, at least, am not ready to adopt any clear hypothesis. As I tell my students at Northwestern, "If you know the answer in advance, it's not research." And this is a research problem. Now it could be that all the creature cases are pranks. But I would have to ask why they seem to occur only in isolated areas, where the chances of confrontation are small. Time and time and time again, the person happens upon them purely by chance, while going down a lonely road and so forth. And the common reported action of the creatures is to get the hell out of there, to get in their craft and get away.

I recognize your queries and your wonderment. Indeed I share them. And I just don't know the answers.

I feel that I'm a little like a traveler who has been to exotic lands, and upon returning feels an obligation to tell the people at home something about the customs of the natives. Some of the stories may sound incredible. But they are, I assure you, the facts. ☺

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