

Store Wars!

Yes, folks, space is almost fully commercialized now, and to prove it, many businesses are now using space-oriented themes for their ads. "Diamond encounters of the expensive kind" has been running for a jewellers' TV blurb. Even a chocolate bar finds its origins in the depths of space. But on a grand scale, the biggest push of this sort in Winnipeg is from Eaton's, that Macy's of the far north. In October, for two weeks, Eaton's hosted Space Odyssey, an exhibition of space paraphernalia, including moon rocks, Russian space hardware, U.S. space hardware, and astronaut, thrown in together with science fiction, UFO's, pure science, astrology, and everybody's favorite, Darth Vader.

Even I was there, sitting at the UFO Reporting booth amongst the exhibits. While there, almost each night for two weeks, I acted as representative of a sort for the Manitoba Planetarium, answering questions regarding its eclipse display, as well as the usual expected questions regarding the UFO display, which included a map of UFO sighting locations in Manitoba (for which I supplied information) and a set of twenty-five color glossies of UFO photographs. Both were mounted on plexiglass and backlit, presenting a very impressive sight indeed. As I had been led to believe I was going to get a set of the glossies, of which three sets were made, I received no payment for my hours at the desk. All sets ended up being donated to the Planetarium, and I got nothing. Needless to say, I am a bit mad about this, but this is neither the time nor place for letting off that much steam.

While the Space Odyssey was running, on October 22nd, at about 8 P.M., a bright red source of light was seen over Port Garry by hundreds of residents as it "hovered" and finally exploded with a loud explosion which shook houses, rattling windows and scaring the living daylight out of many people. Police were baffled, and nobody seemed to be able to figure out what the object had been. Dr. MacNamara of the NRC thought it was a meteor, though it was seen for over three minutes by some witnesses, quite untypical of such phenomena. But, the next morning, the police announced that they had arrested two men for creating a hoax by sending aloft a balloon made from a green garbage bag, filled with helium and acetylene. (Actually, two balloons were released, the second being seen about an hour and a half later.) One of the balloons passed very close to a jet airliner on a landing approach, giving the pilot some cause for worry as he watched the thing explode near the plane. (It would have been disastrous to say the least, if the balloon had floated closer to the plane and gotten sucked into the intake.) I interviewed a number of witnesses, and spoke with several officials about the incident, getting a lot of interesting information. Some of the witnesses "clearly saw" metallic-appearing discs flying around the red bulk of the light. Such is life. At any rate, the case is on file as an IFO (Identified Flying Object).

It seems that I am in charge of the organizing committee for looking into the planning of the next Winnipeg Science Fiction Society convention, to be called UN-Con II. We're looking at a date near the end of May, hopefully the 26th, making it another one-day con, though with an added costume social in the evening. If we can pull it off, it promises to be as much of a success as UN-Con I. If all goes well, we may get a popular SF writer as guest speaker (no names, please). There will be a UFO table in the dealers' area, manned by yours truly, no doubt, answering questions on the latest happenings on the UFO scene.

Turning for a moment to "hard science", I thought I'd mention that come February of 1979, I'll be heading up to Hecla Island with my wife, Lois, for several days of much-needed vacation. Why way up there in the middle of nowhere? That in itself is precisely one of the reasons, another being that the best place in North America for viewing the last eclipse of our lifetimes in this area, is out at Hecla Island. We're booked into the Gull Harbour Resort at the north tip of the island (pretty snazzy, eh?). We'll be part of a group of scientists from around the world who are coming to the frozen wasteland of Manitoba to the eclipse site. There's a big push on right now for Brandon as the best spot, even though Hecla is much closer to Winnipeg, and has less smog than Brandon. At any rate, even Dr. J. A. Hynek is scheduled to be there, as well as various other astronomers and solar specialists from who-knows-where. Rumor has it that it will be a "mini scientific convention" of sorts, and from the stories I've heard about some scientific conventions, I hope so. Leaving science entirely aside, like I sometimes do, anyway, it is a vacation, complete with indoor pool, sauna, dining room, room service, fireplace lounge, - the works. What can I say?

I was listening to a talk the other day, given by a guy who has a tremendous interest in the Government cover-up of UFO reports, especially the incidents regarding the late Wilbur Smith of the National Research Council. For those of you who don't know, Smith was involved with Canada's version of Project Blue Book, actually two committees known as Project Magnet and Project Second Storey. Smith was a brilliant man, apparently, designing and constructing many devices still used by the NRC in electromagnetic research. However, Smith had a hobby that annoyed some of his associates and impressed others: he was interested in UFO's. Really interested. So much so, in fact, that he had the government set up an array of detection devices at one of its research stations. Curiously, it paid off. One day, all the alarms, etc. went off, and everyone rushed outside to have a look at the sky. Nothing was there, but the detectors had indicated that a large object of some sort was slowly flying overhead, invisible to the eye. The press got word, and Smith released a statement that made the papers, to the effect that their instruments had indeed finally detected an unidentified flying object (yes, it actually was in the papers). Shortly after, oddly enough, Smith was stripped of many responsibilities, and assigned another job. But the best part of the story is about Smith's claims that he was in contact with a "space brother" named AFPA, who was visiting Earth because he was worried about the consequences of our tests with nuclear weapons. He also said that he had seen the actual saucers piloted by the space brothers many times. In fact, the aliens had sent "monitors" (basketball-sized robot scouts) to fly around his house, and land in his backyard. These were seen not only by Smith and his family, but by his neighbors, who often told the Smith's to get "those darn things out of" their yards.

A major point is that the Canadian government kept Smith on staff through all this, leading some people to conclude that the government figured Smith was on the level (after all, he had invented several devices, and was called by some "the best in the business"). Other stories centering around Smith include everything from a CIA tie-in to a "secret strongbox" filled with his documents, which seems to be the target of many robbery attempts, the location known only to a select few of family and friends. The full story is far longer than I have space for, in fact, you would be hard pressed to fit it all in a single book. It is a curious story, some of which has been, apparently, confirmed by various officials and co-workers of Smith. Is it true? That's a good question.

As a tidbit of information, I just heard on the news that the NASA Venus probe has sent back information which indicates that the planet may have had a (and I use the NASA scientist's quote) cataclysmic creation. Velikovsky fans will no doubt be happy with that one. ("I told you so!")

Glancing at the top of my "to be looked into" file, I see that the one that is up next is a "cattle mutilation" story from Teulon, Manitoba. The story is that a few years ago, a farmer noticed some cattle were missing at a head count, and went out looking for them. He found them, sure enough, but in a somewhat charred state. The RCMP, it was said, could not explain how they died. A few theories were brought to my attention when I mentioned this to someone, none of which had anything to do with UFO's. It could prove to be an interesting case to follow-up.

James Oberg, who writes the "UFO Update" column for OMNI magazine, is a very good writer, and one of the more objective UFO writers in the business. He wants "just the facts, ma'am", and does a fairly good job of analyzing reports and accounts. The latest OMNI (Dec. '78) carried his review of misidentifications involving Venus, including Jimmy Carter's sighting some years back which was publicized in every UFO zine in North America. Oberg even brought up the famous "Father Gill" case which occurred in New Guinea some years ago. The gist of the story is that a missionary and several natives observed a disc-shaped object on several nights, and on some days, figures were seen moving around on a kind of observation deck. At one point, one of the observers waved to the figures on the floating craft, and to his astonishment, the entity waved back. The Gill case has been attacked on many grounds by skeptics, including Philip Klass, who questioned the eyesight of Gill, and the suggestibility of the natives with him. Oberg also mentions this, and points out that Venus was in the direction of the observed craft on some occasions, as others have pointed out in the past.

Oberg was interviewed in the latest issue of Beyond Reality Magazine's UFO Update, and I found it particularly amusing. Oberg defended attack upon attack from the interviewer, and fared very well. In fact, he made the interviewer seem rather foolish at times. Most interesting is the fact that the magazine printed the whole interview, giving a tremendous boost to the credibility and ability of Oberg.

I watched an episode of Project UFO the other night, something I haven't done in quite a long time (I still say it's one of the best comedy shows around). This one involved a South Dakota incident whereby a fluorescent tube-shaped object deposited two small, multiple-faceted objects inside a cave. In the show, Blue Book tested one, and found it to be made of pure magnesium. In the end, of course, an element of doubt was left as to the integrity of the witness, or rather, one of the witnesses, but the overall impression was that the case could not be solved, or rather, explained. I remember when the show led you to believe that Blue Book could explain everything, and you could at least recognize the cases if you used your imagination a bit. Another impressive thing is that, on the show, "flying saucers" are scarce. Plenty of Star Wars craft, but few discs.

Bugged!

P. Callahan and R.W. Mankin have published a paper in Applied Optics (V. 17, p.3355), showing that there is a definite correlation between UFO sightings and infestations of spruce budworm moths. They have shown that light can be produced

by putting insects in an electric field. Of course, this only happens under certain conditions, and the effect is negligible for a single insect, but given a swarm of the little things, the light would be a strange impression indeed. Constantly changing shape, pulsating, this light from a large swarm could be, in the opinion of Callahan and Mankin, mistaken for a UFO. They even suggested a valuable array of information that could be gleaned from checking UFO reports: tracking insect migration.

This reminded me of something I once read about the Lubbock lights of Texas. In the 1950's, several college professors were observing the sky in a study of micrometeorites, when they suddenly saw a "V"-shaped formation of green lights fly quickly overhead, travelling the entire sky in only three to four seconds.

Then another "flight" was seen, then about a few minutes later, another. In the weeks that followed, hundreds of other witnesses observed the phenomenon, and a few photographs were taken. The people were stumped, but Project Blue Book (or was it Project Grudge at that time?) investigated and decided that the arrays of objects were nothing but migrating, low-flying plover (ducks), whose bellies were reflecting the glow from street lights. This was, of course, immediately ridiculed by quite a lot of individuals, but some tried to duplicate the photographs of the Lubbock Lights by taking pictures of the ducks under the same conditions. Unfortunately, they failed: the ducks simply didn't want to co-operate, and the lighting was too dim. Yet others, including one person I talked to in Manitoba, said he had seen the effect many times while hunting (I know, my grammar faltered on that one). By far the most intriguing idea was proposed by L. Jerome Stanton, in his book, "Flying Saucers: Hoax or Reality" (Belmont, 1966). In it, he explained that the Lubbock Lights were caused by the streetlights reflecting off the wings of low-flying moths.

Which brings me to the end of another Swamp Gas Journal. This was to be a "one-shot", if you recall: perhaps it will be a "two-shot", or a three, or four. It is certainly interesting, to say the least, to publish one's own fanzine, and I'm glad I was talked into it. It takes up a lot of time to produce, and a lot of energy. Yes, I know about the typos, and the bad grammar in parts, but typing as one thinks is not necessarily typing as one writes.

As a bit of a plug, the next time you're down at the Manitoba Planetarium, the seven-foot-high plexiglass map of UFO sightings was planned and designed by me, and the information contained on the key is my own research (I was the sole investigator for 18 of the 23 cases presented).

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