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Russians see light on UFOs

A SPECIAL commission of the Soviet Academy of Sciences has officially acknowledged that the crew of an Aeroflot airliner on a domestic flight encountered "something that we call UFO's." Details of the incident appeared in the trade-union newspaper Trud. It was the first detailed Soviet account of an unidentified flying object based on air and ground observation.

Flight 8852 from Tblisi to Tallinn was 75 miles from Minsk when, according to the crew, the co-pilot noticed, at 4.10am, a huge, bright yellowish star. The object emitted a thin ray of light which suddenly widened into a blinding cone, followed by two more cones. Passengers were surprised to see streets below them bathed in bright lights, but they became alarmed when the "searchlight" settled on the plane itself.

The light vanished, leaving a greenish cloud that began to descend at extraordinary speed and eventually took up position behind the airliner. The pilot alerted ground control, which pinpointed the UFO flying behind the plane at 30,000ft and 300 miles an hour.

The cloud changed shape into a plum, then a square and finally "solidified" as a giant, needle-nosed, wingless aircraft with a curious animal-like tail illuminated by a green and yellow light.

This "cloud plane" followed the airliner over Riga and Vilnius. Ground control in both places picked up two aircraft when flight schedules showed only one airborne at the time, and tracked them all the way to Tallinn, where the intruder was again picked up on radar.

But a US space mission controller at Nasa claims UFO sightings are used by the Russians to cover up tests of strategic weapons that violate the 1963 outer space treaty. James Oberg says rocket launches and the fiery return to earth of dummy warheads cannot be concealed from the Soviet public, so they are presented as mysterious intruders from other worlds.

Gabriel Ronay